

EVERY "BOY SCOUT" SHOULD READ THIS

AMERICAN WEEKLY INDIAN

BY COLONEL SPENCER DAIR



THE RED MASSACRE.





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THE RED MASSACRE

or

The Hold-up Men of Barren Lands

By COL. SPENCER DAIR

CHARACTERS.

LORD FORREST, LADY FORREST, HAROLD PONSONBY, JUDITH PONSONBY—Members of the ultra fashionable and wealthy English aristocracy who go to the Canadian North-West on a hunting trip. After many experiences, the ladies are kidnapped their rescue almost resulting in the death of all four.

BAPTISTE, HENRI—Trapper-guides attached to the Post of the Hudson's Bay Company where the English folk are sojourning when the kidnapping occurs.

BADEYE—Leader of the Hold-up Men of Barren Lands who robs the Post on Lake Rey and finally meets a terrible death after eluding all the men who go in pursuit of the wealthy women he kidnaps.

PIEFACE, SLASHER, REDTOP, BUSTER, EASY, LONG HAIR—Members of Badeye's gang of bandits.

HANS FIELDER—Storekeeper at the Post which is raided by the notorious outlaw.

BIG MOOSE—Indian chieftain who meets a terrible death at the hands of Badeye as he is striving to steal the white women from the desperado.

INSPECTOR CAWDOR, CONSTABLES O'TOOLE AND CANTON—Members of the Royal North-West Mounted Police who play an important part in the recovery of the kidnapped women.

GUIDES, TRAPPERS, CONSTABULARY AND INDIANS.

CHAPTER I.

THE RAID ON THE FUR COMPANY'S STORE.

"Hand up the pay box, Dutchie—and be quick about it!"

This startling command, heard by the storekeeper at one of the trading posts of the great Hudson Bay Company, in Mackenzie Territory, caused him to raise his head from the account book over which he was bending.

But the move was a disastrous one for him!

Crash! went the sixshooter which the leader of the Hold-Up Men of Barren Lands held in his right hand—and a red spot in the storekeeper's left ear told the course of the bullet!

"That's just to learn you not to get too all-fired curious!" snarled the bandit. "Now hand over the

company's pay box! I'll give you till I count three—if it isn't on the counter by the time I've finished, I'll drop you and help myself!"

"One—t—w—"

But before the word had been uttered, there came the sound of hurried footsteps and a head was thrust through the open door.

As he heard the footfalls, the storekeeper hoped that it might be some friendly trapper who, having been startled by the report of the shot, had hastened to learn its cause.

His hopes were dashed almost as quickly as they had arisen, however, for the newcomer cried:

"What's the trouble, Badeye? The old top putting up a holler?"

"Naw—he just seemed to want to see who was talking. But so long's you're here, Pieface, you might as well go round behind the counter and help him hand

up the cash. Dutchie don't act overwilling. Step lively, 'cause he evidently expects callers—and we want to make a clean getaway!"

No urging did the second Hold-up Man need to carry out the instructions of his leader for haste and while the storekeeper vented his anger at the robbery in a flow of curses and oaths that would have made a mule-driver green with envy, the robber picked up the little square iron box from under the counter and set it down on the rough board.

"Take a peep inside, Pieface, and be sure you've got the right one—we don't want to tote off somethin' that ain't worth the carrying!"

Quickly the man obeyed, thanks to the fact the storekeeper had been in the act of going over his accounts and had the box open to make sure it contained enough money to pay them.

"That's the baby, all right, all right!" chuckled the man who had been addressed as Badeye, when his glance rested upon the packages of crisp bank notes. Put them bills in your shirt, Pieface, they'll be sure safe there—and if we meet anybody, there won't be no danger of dropping them!"

This command was obeyed almost as soon as it was spoken and, with a grin of satisfaction, the robber passed from behind the counter to the side of his leader.

"Much obliged, Dutchie, for taking things so nice and quiet like!" taunted Badeye. "I knew I wasn't making no mistake when I decided to collect from you instead of from Jeff Peters, over on the Yellow-knife."

"When you make your report to the company, you can say Badeye's willing to consider his account settled—though I may——"

Of a sudden, as the leader of the Hold-up Men was baiting the storekeeper, there rang out three sharp whistles!

Instantly the grins disappeared from the faces of the two outlaws.

"That's Slasher!" declared Pieface, excitedly.

"Glad it ain't Redtop!" returned his chief. "We've got a heap sight bigger chance to get away on Slasher's trail than we would have on the other."

"You go first—I'll stay behind to guard you and stand any one off who tries to cut in. Dutchie, so's you won't be tempted to hit our trail. I'll just hobble you!"

As he spoke, the terrible outlaw took a rapid stride to the edge of the counter—and pulled the trigger of his sixshooter the second time.

And as the report rang out, the storekeeper fell to the floor, the blood gushing from a wound in his groin!

Almost simultaneously with the reverberation from this shot, another sounded on the air—followed by the piercing shrieks of women screaming in terror!

CHAPTER II.

THE KIDNAPPING.

With a bound, the two bandits who had robbed the storekeeper of the company's cash gained the door—and as they gazed in the direction whence the sound of the shot had come, they were amazed to behold two women dashing toward the log stockade, closely followed by Slasher!

Evident was it that they had exerted all their strength to reach the company's house in the hope of escaping from the bandit who was pursuing them. But the sight of the two grim-visaged strangers in the doorway told them that such an attempt would be folly and they darted into the underbrush.

"After 'em, Slasher, I'll help you!" shouted Badeye, leaping forward as he spoke. "Pieface, you make your getaway!"

Amazed to think that two such beautiful women—for the brief time that he had been given to see them was sufficient for the leader of the Hold-up men to notice that they were exquisite beyond the ordinary—should be in the Barren Lands of Mackenzie Territory, Badeye had shrewdly guessed that they must be persons of importance and into his cunning mind had come the thought of adding to the sum total of his raid by kidnapping them and holding them for ransom.

The handicap of their corduroy hunting skirts proved too great for the women and though they fought like Amazons, laying about them with the butts of their rifles, it was but the work of a few minutes for the two outlaws to knock the weapons from their hands and bind their arms behind them with strips of rawhide.

"Whatcher going to do with 'em?" queried Slasher, as soon as the fair prisoners had been made fast.

"Take 'em with us. Quick, you take the smaller one and I'll take the other!"

"Aw, what's the use of hampering ourselves with a couple of skirts?" growled the other outlaw. "They'll be in the way all the time. They can't make fifty miles a day like we can—we'll have to crawl along—and maybe get shot because we can't travel fast 'count of them!"

"We *wont* be shot at so long as we have the ladies," returned Badeye. "But even if we should that's not the question—I told you to take the smaller one! Now take her, or I'll drop you where you stand!"

Realizing from long experience with the notorious leader of the Hold-up men that he would keep his word—for a human life meant not as much as that of a wild animal to him because, as he had often said, a human being isn't fit to eat—Slasher kept his objections to himself and seizing the prisoner allotted to him, threw her over his shoulder as lightly as though she were a bag of flour, then followed his chief, who had already taken the trail.

The other member of the raiding outlaws, Redtop, having been attracted by the shooting and screaming, had come up just as Slasher was disappearing over the trail with his victim.

Divining that something unusual was on foot, he hastened after his pal, at the same time keeping a look-out behind against surprise from that quarter.

"What's doing?" he demanded as he overtook his fellow bandit.

"Oh, Badeye's gone bugs over these two skirts. I told him it was sure death to tote off, but he wouldn't listen to me—and so we've got to hit the trail with the two of 'em."

"Huh, I reckon Badeye's right about their being a good haul—providing the other's as nifty as this one."

"She's better."

"Then where's your trouble?"

"It's a cinch the company won't let our little call on 'Dutch' Fielder go unnoticed—and when we get the Royal Northwest Mounted Police on our tracks, these dames are more than likely to delay us. Why, there ain't a woman who can knock off more'n thirty miles a day, allowing she's used to hiking—which these ones surely ain't!"

"Oh, well, Badeye knows what he's up to. Probably he intends to ransom 'em—anyhow, a woman's worth something up in the Barren Lands."

Straight along the trail to the North which skirted the Eastern shore of Lake Rey, in the almost unknown area between Great Salve and Great Bear lakes, the outlaws trotted with their booty and prisoners for two miles, then made a sharp turn and descended to the water where they had left their canoes.

"Redtop, you take the beauty Slasher's toting and put her in the canoe with Pieface. I'll keep Slasher and the other one with me. We'll paddle to our first dug-out and then stop there for a few hours, long enough for me to find out what's doing back at the company's shack!"

"You'll find that there will be a great deal 'doing'—to use your vulgarism—when Mr. Ponsonby and Lord Forrest return and learn what has happened to us!" exclaimed the prisoner whom the leader of the bandits had been carrying.

"Ha, so we're going to have a Lord on our trail, eh?" chuckled Badeye. "And I suppose one of you is Lady Forrest?" he added, looking from one to the other of the thoroughly angry women.

"I am Lady Forrest!" declared the one whom Slasher had brought to the canoes. "And I advise you to release us this instant—if you value your lives! If it's ransom that you want, I'll give you my rings—you can see them by unbinding my arms and taking off my gloves. They're worth at least five thousand dollars!"

"Which isn't a tenth part of what me lord will have

to pay if he wants to get you back!" returned the bandit-chieftain. "No, no, ladies, much as it goes against my finer nature to subject you to such treatment, I reckon you'll prove the most valuable pelts that have ever been bagged in the Barren Lands, eh, boys?"

"That's what!" chorused the other outlaws, thus appealed to.

"But this is outrageous—infamous! The idea of persons like you daring to lay violent hands on Mrs. Ponsonby and me!" snapped Lady Forrest. "Do you realize that Lord Forrest is one of the richest and most powerful peers in England?"

"Sorry to say, Lady, my acquaintance with such like ain't extensive—but I'm sure glad to know your husband's rich," grinned Badeye. "He'll be able to give up fifty thousand for you—and it won't bother him at all."

"Considering the circumstances, boys, and the value of our guests, I'll just go along to the dug-out with you and make sure they're comfortable before I go back to Dutchie's to open negotiations!"

Again was the fiery Lady Forrest about to speak when her companion interposed.

"For heaven's sake, Angela, do keep quiet! You've talked so much already that these brutes know the wealth of our husbands—and it will cost them more to get us back with every word you speak!"

The sharp rebuke brought a flush to the cheeks and a flash of anger to the eyes of the titled woman but she profited by the advice and lapsed into silence, much to the disappointment of the outlaws.

CHAPTER III.

A DESPERATE ATTEMPT AT ESCAPE.

As the leader of the bandits announced his decision to go to the hiding place with his pals, he stepped into his canoe, gave it a mighty shove which sent it far out into the placid waters of the lake in the wilderness and then bent to the paddle, his powerful strokes being taken with an ease which belied their effectiveness.

Mrs. Ponsonby had been placed flat in the bottom of the frail craft and though she turned her head from side to side, she could get no idea of the direction in which they were going and, determined to know—despite her seeming acquiescence to the fate which had overtaken her and her companion, she had formed a desperate resolve not to be taken as a prisoner wherever the outlaws willed—and with a sudden movement, she raised her head and glanced about her.

But the moment she moved, Slasher pointed his six-shooter at her and hissed:

"Just keep where you was put. If you make another move like that, I'll have to send you to sleep!"

The short time she had had, however, proved sufficient for the sportswoman to recognize landmarks which told her that they were still travelling to the North and, satisfied, she made no further attempt to sit up.

But in her mind she was planning her coup—and tensely she listened for the moment when she should spring it!

Close alongside Badeye's canoe, Redtop kept his. After the first few hundred yards, the desperadoes of the Barren Lands hugged the shore, evidently afraid that they might be seen from the company's post.

At last, however, they reached the location of the dugout. To any one not aware of its existence, its presence never would have been suspected!

A bluff, some twenty feet high, ran along the lake for more than three hundred yards and at its bottom was a rank growth of reeds and underbrush.

To the Hold-up men, however, who knew almost every bush surrounding the entire lake, the slant of the underbrush away from the water indicated the exact spot where the opening to their cave was.

"Slasher, I'll swing the canoe round so you can get out first. Go right up to the dug-out and break out some grub. We can't let our prisoners go hungry and lose flesh. Redtop, let—"

But the instructions were never finished!

Realizing that the time for action had come, were she to put her plan, desperate as it was, into execution, the moment she felt the canoe turning, Mrs. Ponsonby gave a mighty lurch, throwing herself against the gunwale of the frail craft in a frantic effort to capsize it!

In an instant, the leader of the outlaws understood her purpose and exerted his utmost skill to steady the canoe—but without avail. Over went the frail craft, spilling the three occupants into the ice cold water.

And as the canoe capsized, the plucky woman grasped the side of the other and jerked it over.

So unexpected had been the action that the bandits were caught unprepared and, spluttering and cursing they struggled in the lake.

Seizing her titled companion as she struck the water, Mrs. Ponsonby whispered, tensely:

"Now's our time, Angela! From the way some of these brutes act, I know they can't swim. Keep beside me—and if you feel your strength going, put your hand on my shoulder—I'm going to head back down the lake!"

Much less time than it takes to relate them did these incidents and instructions take and while the discom-

fited outlaws were still struggling, the two women set off with easy, powerful strokes which not alone told that they were accomplished swimmers but that they had learned to swim in clothes.

Unfortunately for the brave woman, however, she had waited too long before springing her coup!

The water where she had capsized the canoes was only about eight feet deep and the outlaws, with the aid of the overturned canoes, had managed by dint of hard work to make their way to still shallower water—where it was but little work for them to gain the shore—and when they did, awful were the curses which they called down upon the head of the woman who had subjected them to their unwelcome immersion. For not alone were they drenched to the skin but they had lost their rifles.

But Badeye did not intend to lose his opportunity to add to the spoils of the theft of the Fur company's cash the ransom for the wives of the wealthy Englishmen!

"Quick, grab the other end of my canoe, Redtop," he commanded and when this had been done, he continued: "Now raise it up and turn it so we can dump out the water."

To men of less strength, the task would have required hard exertion and many minutes but the leader of the Hold-up men and his assistant performed the trick with remarkable ease.

"Get some long pieces of rawhide, Slasher," he cried. "Pieface, bring a couple of paddles from the dug-out. Be lively," he added, striding onto the shore that he might get a view of the swimming fugitives. "The women are beginning to head for the land!"

Quickly the members of the outlaw band obeyed and in a few minutes Badeye was driving his canoe in pursuit of the women with strokes made the more powerful by his anger.

But the bandits did not find the recapture of their quarry so easy as they had expected!

As Mrs. Ponsonby beheld the approach of the canoe, she turned her head toward her companion.

"We'll spread out, Angela, so the canoe can come in between us. If they try to take you aboard first, I'll seize the side and dump them again. If they try to take me, you must do it. The water is much deeper here—and if I get the chance, as soon as the brutes have capsized, I'll get the canoe and push it away so they won't be able to take hold of it again!"

Clever, indeed, was the scheme—and it would have succeeded had not Badeye been one of the men in the frail craft. No sooner had he seen the two women separate, however, than he exclaimed:

"They're up to some monkey business, Redtop. We'll take the little one first, she isn't so hard to handle or so tricky as the other. I'll circle around so we can get in front of her. When I give the word, you throw

your rawhide over her head and *pull on it hard!* No matter if it does choke her, it won't be for long—but mind you keep her short of breath! Then we'll do the same thing to the other!"

All the while he had been speaking the leader of the outlaws had been working his canoe out and ahead of the fugitives and almost as he finished his instructions, he cried:

"Now!"

With a sharp hiss, the long piece of moose hide shot through the air, its loop expanding as it sped, then quivered a moment and finally settled over Lady Forrest's head—and as it landed about her neck, Redtop gave a jerk that caused the woman to groan with pain.

"Good boy: now the other one!"

But Mrs. Ponsonby was not to prove so easy a catch!

With the skill of a porpoise, she dove and dodged, but the weight of her clothes taxed her strength and at last the second noose settled about her neck!

CHAPTER IV.

FRIEND OR FOE.

The awful pressure against their chins as the rawhide ropes tightened, coupled with the thought that their captors might strangle them to death, made the women desist from offering any further resistance as Badeye once more started to paddle up to the dug-out.

Not many strokes had he taken with his paddle, however, than his keen ear caught a gurgling and gasping from Lady Forrest.

"Reckon you'd best change the rope hold on these women, Redtop," he announced. "We don't want no dead ladies hanging round our camps—they won't bring near as much as live ones. Just put the rawhides under their arms."

As he spoke, the leader of the Hold-up Men of Barren Lands sent the canoe back and soon his pal was making the necessary shifts.

"Why not take 'em into the canoe, chief? It'll everlastingly take the gimp out of 'em to haul 'em from here to the hole in the bluff, through the water."

"Oh, it won't hurt 'em any. And I don't mind if they are taken down a bit. That big one there's so cute she'd give us a lot of trouble if we didn't spoil her spirits, somehow."

His wet clothes reminding him all too forcibly of Mrs. Ponsonby's resourcefulness, Redtop offered no objection to the inhuman treatment Badeye proposed to give his fair captives and the canoe went up the lake with its strange tow.

Arrived for the second time at the entrance to the

dug-out, the leader of the bandits hailed the man he had left and, as they joined him at the shore, exclaimed:

"Get some pieces of cloth so we can blindfold these ladies. I ain't a-going to take any chances on their seeing the place so they can tell their hubbies when they are brought back."

Hastily Pieface and Slasher went back to the cave, procured strips of gingham and upon their return to the canoe proceeded to bind them around the foreheads of the beautiful prisoners.

This precaution taken, the women were quickly led through the underbrush and soon found themselves inside the dug-out where the bandages were removed.

"If you ladies feel hungry, we should be pleased to have you help yourselves," announced Badeye, bowing with mock deference toward the table upon which his companions had set out some food.

"Eat?" snapped Lady Forrest, her anger again sharpening her tongue. "How can you expect us to eat when we are drenched to the skin? Build a fire at once and permit us to dry ourselves—otherwise we shall take terrible colds."

"Sorry but a fire's the one thing we can't have," smiled the bandit-chieftain. "The smoke would tell any one who might be looking for you all too plainly where you are."

"But you certainly don't expect to keep us in these sopping clothes, do you?" demanded Mrs. Ponsonby. "Even if you are robbers, murderers and kidnappers of defenseless women, you can't be so monstrously inhuman as——"

"Just cut out them words in the future lady, they don't sound pretty coming from your lips!" interrupted Badeye—and there was a suggestiveness in his tone which led the proud woman to heed his caution. Come to think of it, I don't know but we've got some Squaw duds kicking about somewhere. Pieface, see if you can't find 'em."

"I found 'em already and here they are," announced the fellow, going to a dark corner of the cave whence he returned with two pairs of leggings and two skirts, all made of deer skin, and a couple of dark blue flannel shirts.

"If you care to wear these, you're welcome," declared the leader of the outlaws as he placed the garments on a chair.

Lady Forrest threw up her hands in disgust at the thought of donning such habiliments but Mrs. Ponsonby exclaimed:

"Don't be squeamish, Angela—anything is better than to drag around in the things we have on. Besides, it won't be long before Harold and Hugh come for us and we can get back into our own things again when we get to the Post."

"Much obliged for reminding me of them gents," grinned Badeye. "I'd most forgotten about sending

'em word that you was safe and waiting for them to fork over some coin so's you could go back to 'em."

"Now if you ladies'll just make your change of clothes as fast as you can, I'll be planning my note and when you're done I'll write it and get it away."

Too angry to speak because of the contempt with which the outlaw-chieftain treated their high position in society, the women began to examine the garments as the bandits left the cave.

"Don't try to get away," warned Badeye, pausing in the entrance. "There ain't no way but this front one—and if you make a dash out of it, we'll drop you in your tracks, ransom or no ransom!"

While the prisoners were doffing their drenched clothes and getting into the others, the outlaws had their first opportunity to talk together since the raid on the company's Post.

"How'd you happen to fall to the dames, Slasher?" asked Pieface. "I supposed some of the traders were coming in on the run when I heard your whistles."

"So did I—until I heard women's voices," returned the man who had given the warning to his pals in the stockade. "I was lying in the bushes, listening down the trail when I heard sounds and just as I was trying to pace 'em—for they weren't like what no hunter or wild animal would make—I heered a laugh and preety quick along come the women and Henri, only the half-breed was in the lead.

"From the way he acted, I could tell he thought there was something wrong at the Post and when he started on the run, I just dropped him."

The cold blooded manner in which the desperado referred to the murder of the guide did not even produce a look of surprise from his companions!

"To bad it warn't Baptiste, he's a heap sight cleverer than Henri ever thought of being," lamented Redtop, as Slasher ended his story.

"Never mind, I reckon we'll have a chance to get him before this business is over," smiled Badeye. "Hey, ladies, is you dressed yet?"

"No, no indeed," shrilled the women.

"Then please get a move on—you're delaying me considerable; I'll give you till I count ten and if you're not ready by that time, I'm going in, anyhow!"

As a matter of fact, the prisoners had changed their clothes before the bandit-chieftain spoke and had been searching the cave in the hope of finding some weapon they could use to obtain their liberty. But that they might cover their attempt, they waited until the limit of the count had been reached.

Ere Badeye had the opportunity to enter the cave, however, Slasher, from his lookout, called:

"There's a canoe coming across the lake, Badeye!"

CHAPTER V.

BADEYE WRITES HIS DEMAND FOR RANSOM.

As a matter of precaution, the notorious leader of the Hold-up Men of Barren Lands had ordered the brush placed in position before the entrance to the cave and for that reason he was unable to get a view of the lake and the canoe the unexpected approach of which had been announced at a time so inopportune for him.

"How many are in it?" he asked of his lookout.

"Only one."

"How far out is he?"

"About quarter of a mile."

"Did you bring our canoes into the reeds, Pieface, or leave them in the lake where they could be seen?"

"Brought them in."

"Good boy! Slasher, let me know as soon as you can tell who or what sort of a man it is in the canoe."

Even though the prisoners, like their captors, were unable to obtain a glimpse of the water, the words of the bandits, which betrayed evident uneasiness, gave them courage.

"Perhaps it's Harold!" exclaimed Mrs. Ponsonby. "He went across the lake this morning. As he took his binoculars with him, he may have seen the brutal treatment to which we have been subjected and be coming to rescue us!"

"Wouldn't that be stunning, what?" returned her companion. "I say, let's take a chance and scream to let him know where we are!"

The suggestion aroused the bandit-chieftain like a blow in the face.

"Quick, gag them, Pieface and Redtop! Whether it's Harold or some Percy boy, we can't afford to take any chances on these dames giving our hiding place away!"

Instantly the outlaws sprang to carry out the orders of their leader and as they finished so stuffing the mouths of the Englishwomen that they could scarcely breathe, to say nothing of uttering a sound, Slasher's voice sounded:

"It's Big Moose, the Cree chief!"

"Going down to the Post to draw pay for his furs, probably," declared Redtop.

"My eye, won't he be howling wild when he finds the funds have disappeared?" chuckled Pieface. "Dutchie'll be lucky if the Injun don't turn round and scalp him. He ain't got a bit of love for the company. Last year he was docked a couple of hundred dollars, 'count of bad belts and it was only by giving him a lot of firewater that the agent got rid of him. But I'll bet the last cartridge in my belt that he won't believe it when Dutchie tells him his cash's been stolen. Wow! I'd like to be down to the Post to see the fun!"

"Canoe's turned and going down the lake," exclaimed the lookout.

This report was received with a sigh of relief by Badeye and picking up one of the candles which he had put out when the approach of the stranger was first announced, he went to the table where he set it and then to a hole dug in the wall from which he produced a strip of birch bark and a pencil.

For several minutes he chewed the end of it and then began to write laboriously, stopping every now and then to wet the lead in his mouth but at last he finished.

"There, I reckon that'll make 'em sit up and take notice!" he chuckled.

"Read it!" exclaimed Pieface and Redtop, together.

Clearing his throat, like an embarrassed schoolboy about to recite a piece of poetry, the bandit-chieftain began:

"lord forest. Yure wife and the wife of yure frend is safe. Sorry we didn't have the plezur of meetin yu but that will come later, pervidin that is if yu wants to see yure wifes agen. lady forest havin kinely tole me yu was rich, I want to say that you can hev her back an yure fren can hev hisn by payin fifty thousand apeece. Taint much when yu considers what good lookers they are but well hev the chence of meetin yu agen so we wont be tew hard on yu the fust time. if you want yure wives back, send word by baptest tell him to come to the big jack pine at digger brook befor sunrise. if yu aint got the money, well hold the ladies while yu get only let me no. if baptest aint at the jack pine by sunrise ill no yu dont want em and will trade em to some of the bucks or halfbreeds. this aint no joke so dont delay if yu wants yure wives. if yu dont think I means wat i says as dutchie, he nos me. with love badeye."

While the bandit-chieftain had been reading this amazing note, he had kept watch of the faces of his captives out of one corner of his eye—and the flushes of anger that he beheld told him he had indited a communication that would produce action upon the part of the English Lord and his companion—but the action was destined to be his doom!

"That sure'll stir the animals up," grinned Redtop, when his leader had finished. "Who you going to send it by?"

"Going to take it myself."

"Better not take the risk," asserted Pieface. "I'd just as soon go—and if anything happened to me it wouldn't mean so much."

"That's all right, boy, but I want to tend to this little job myself."

"It's a bad trail in the dark," mused Redtop.

"Now don't go to worrying about me," interposed Badeye. "I'm going down in my canoe so there won't be any trouble."

"Unless Big Moose sets out after you. Good as you are at the paddle, chief, there ain't a man on earth that can handle one like that Injun."

"I know that—and I'll take precious good care to cut a couple of sizeable holes in his canoe before I deliver my little note," returned the leader of the desperadoes. "And now let's have a bite to eat. I'll be able to work better if I put something under my belt—and the ladies is hungry, too, I can tell from the way they're chewing on them gags."

This sally brought roars of laughter from the other outlaws and quickly they drew up to the table while Badeye removed the pieces of cloth from the prisoner's mouths.

"This ain't no hightoned feed but you'll get used to it after a day or two. Now——"

"Don't flatter yourselves that we shall be your captives for that length of time!" flashed Lady Forrest. "As soon as Lord Forrest knows where we are, he'll come and get us. Indeed, I doubt if you will live to leave the Post after delivering your insulting missive!"

"Now don't you go to worrying your head about me," grinned Badeye. "You take my advice and stow away as much of this grub as you can—we'll be hitting the trail as soon as I get back from the Post and eating'll give you strength."

The announcement that they were not to remain in the dug-out filled the women with consternation. But a look from Mrs. Ponsonby checked the retort that was on her friend's tongue and they ate with what relish they could.

CHAPTER VI.

THE EVIDENCE OF THE RAID IS DISCOVERED.

When he had partaken of all the food he cared for, the bandit-chieftain delivered orders to his men for their actions while he was away on his mission, bowed with mock gravity to his prisoners, took two six-shooters from a secret niche in the wall of the cave, then called to his lookout.

"Any one on the lake, Slasher?"

"Nary a soul."

"Good. Stay on duty till I get back—your eyes are better than those of my other boys. If you see any trouble or commotion down by the Post, tell the boys and have them put the women in the canoes and strike for headquarters."

"If anything happens to me, don't accept any ransom at all—sell the women to the highest bidders among Running Bear's tribe!"

At the thought of so awful a fate, the two women shuddered and shrank back from their captors, actions which delighted the cruel bandit-chieftain and with a chuckle he added:

"Keep a close watch on the beauties—they're right

cute and tricky! I'll be back in half an hour, barring accidents."

As he reached his canoe, Badeye stooped down, picked up a fair-sized stone, wound the insulting note about it, tied the birchbark fast with a piece of rawhide, then entered his frail craft and was soon gliding noiselessly over the surface of the lake.

The shots attendant upon the raid on the Fur company's cash had not been heard by Henri and the women alone. Baptiste, who had guided Lord Forrest and Harold Ponsonby more to the South in a quest for bear had heard the faint reports. Ignorant of their meaning yet believing they denoted trouble—and serious trouble at that—he had told his fears to his patrons and quickly they had retraced their steps to the Post.

In addition to being heavy stockholders in the Fur company both Forrest and Ponsonby were hunters of big game and they had brought their wives with them on a tour of the Posts, considering it rare sport to traverse the almost unknown expanses of the great Mackenzie Territory.

Almost to the arctic circle had they been and it was on their return that they stopped at the Post on Lake Rey presided over by Hans Fielder, whom the trappers had nicknamed "Dutchie."

As a usual thing, payment for the furs shipped out in the spring was made promptly but in this year there had been some delay and it was early June when the money arrived. And no one was so glad to see the squad of the Royal North-West Mounted Police which accompanied the paymaster as was the storekeeper for many and violent had been the arguments he had been drawn into by the angry trappers over the failure to pay them. And it was in consequence of this desire to have everything in readiness against the return of the first trapper that the storekeeper had been counting out his money and checking his accounts against it when Badeye and his gang had made their descent upon him.

Word had been brought to the bandits by a runner from among their friends at Fort Rae, some fifty miles to the South on an arm of the Great Slave Lake, that the pay chest had been sent to the Lake Rae Post—but the informant did not know that an injury to one of the horses had caused a day's delay in its delivery.

And this fact was to prove the richly merited downfall of the Hold-up Men of Barren Lands—for when the raid upon Fielder was made, the members of the famous constabulary were less than twenty-five miles from the Post!

Coming in by the trail which Redtop had been guarding, the Englishmen and their guide did not run across the body of Henri weltering in its blood. But the sharp eyes of Baptiste detected the spot where the outlaw had maintained his watch.

"Some one been here," he exclaimed, suddenly, drop-

ping to his knees and pointing to marks on the ground which neither of his companions could see.

"Never mind, come on to the Post—I've a feeling something's wrong!" returned Ponsonby.

Crestfallen to think his powers as a scout received such scant attention, the guide, nevertheless sprang to his feet, crying:

"Have ze care, have ze care! Let Baptiste go first. Maybe ambush at storehouse!"

At this suggestion, both Englishmen threw their rifles to their shoulders, that they might be ready for any emergency, and followed the Fenchman to the edge of the clearing in which the stockade stood, where they waited while Baptiste made his way inside.

Not long were they kept in suspense, however!

A glance at the interior of the store revealed the keeper half way round the end of the counter whither he had crawled before unconsciousness overtook him.

With a bound, the guide was over the boards and looking in the spot where he knew Fielder always kept his cash box—and as he saw the empty iron case on the floor, he gasped in terror!

"Queeck! Queeck! it is a raid!" he shouted, running to the door and beckoning to the Englishmen to join him.

Thoroughly alarmed, the two men dashed across the clearing and into the stockade.

"Is he dead?" demanded Forrest, as he approached the storekeeper.

"No, hees chest she move," replied Baptiste.

"What did they get?" asked Ponsonby.

"Ze monee for ze trappers!"

"By St. George! That's a bally shame—and after the way the poor devils have been bully ragging old Fielder too," exclaimed his lordship. "I say, Ponsonby, suppose we chip in and advance enough funds to pay the fellers off, what?"

During this conversation, the guide had left the storeroom and was making a hasty examination of the ground outside when he discerned the foot prints of the women and followed them to the spot where his fellow guide lay.

And as he beheld the white face and the pool of blood in which the head was lying, he gave vent to a scream that quickly brought the Englishman upon the scene.

"Where can Judith and Angela be?" gasped Ponsonby. "This is their guide and they surely never would leave him. I——"

"Perhaps they are in their rooms, too frightened to stir out," suggested Forrest and they both rushed back to the stockade, threw open the doors to their rooms and stared blankly as they beheld them empty.

Baptiste, however, had been trailing the footprints and soon discovered where the two women had entered the bushes, the spot of the struggle and the heavier

tracks made by the bandits as they strode forth, weighted down with their captives. And in an instant, the guide comprehended what had transpired!

Darting back to the log house, he met the two Englishmen at the door.

"Ze mesdames, zey have been keednapped!" he shrieked.

"What do you mean? How do you know?" demanded Ponsonby.

"I have ze tracks seen."

"Where?"

"Come. I show." And followed by the anxious husbands, the Frenchman led the way to the bushes.

"Which way did the devils carry them, Baptiste?" demanded Forrest, after staring at the trampled ground for several minutes.

"To the North."

"Then after them! Come on, Ponsonby! Baptiste, you lead us to the kidnappers and I'll give you a hundred pounds—five hundred dollars in your money!"

At the mention of so great a price, the guide leaped forward, taking his patrons at a smart trot until he came to the place where the bandits had turned and made their way to the lake.

Realizing the significance of the change in direction, the Frenchman exclaimed:

"It is no use in trying to follow on foot. Ze keednappers have taken to ze lake. Back to the house and to the canoe!"

Forrest was on the point of disputing the advisability of the move when his companion prevented and sick at heart they returned.

"Who do you think did this?" demanded Ponsonby, as they reached the door.

"Only one man would have ze nerve—Badeye!" declared Baptiste, positively.

"Who's he?" chorused his patrons.

"Ze leader of ze Hold-up men!"

"Why didn't you tell us he was in this locality, if you knew he was so desperate a fellow?" thundered his lordship. "I believe you are in shares with him on this business!" And he strode menacingly toward the diminutive guide.

"Now don't be an ass, Hugh, and set Baptiste against us. How should he know the bandit was in this region? We've heard of him ever since we left Great Bear Lake.

"Come, Baptiste, how long will it take you to overhaul Cawdor and his constables?"

"Depends how fast they ride, maybe ten hour, maybe not before zey reach ze Fort."

"Well, I'll give you five thousand dollars if you'll get them back here before morning!"

"But why wouldn't it be better for us to keep Baptiste here and go after the girls in the canoe?" protested Forrest.

"Because we three are no match for the bandits—you and I know nothing about the country and if anything should happen to Baptiste, where'd we be?"

CHAPTER VII.

BIG MOOSE AGREES TO HELP THE ENGLISHMEN.

Realizing that by taking up the trail with only one man who knew the lay of the land they would probably be jeopardizing the chances for rescuing their wives, Forrest yielded the point.

"I'll give you a sum equal to that promised by Ponsonby if you succeed in bringing back the Mounted Police, Baptiste," he exclaimed. "And don't linger a minute longer than necessary. We can look after Fielder and there are guns enough in the place to enable us to stand off any more raiders."

His eyes fairly snapping at the thought of possessing so much money, the guide cried:

"Me go—me go now!" and with a bound he struck the trail, settling into a steady gait, part lope, part trot, that carried him over the ground at a surprising rate of speed.

"Wonder how the bandits got the drop on Fielder, he always seemed like a mighty level-headed chap," exclaimed Forrest as he and his companion retraced their steps to the stockade.

"We'll learn that when we've brought the old fellow back to his senses. Get some brandy, Hugh, while I bind up his wound. There's only Scotch in my flask."

Quickly the other went in search of the powerful restorative while Ponsonby removed the wounded man's buckskin trousers from the wound and began to wipe away the blood with his kerchief.

Raising the storekeeper's head tenderly, Forrest poured a stiff dose of the brandy down his throat and they soon had the satisfaction of seeing the German open his eyes.

For a moment he blinked, seemingly trying to gather his wits, then exclaimed:

"Thank Himmel you've got back! Did you get the ladies?"

"No, we were too late."

"Where's Baptiste?"

"Gone to bring back Cawdor and his constables."

"Gut! Gut! They are the ones to ketch that Badeye! They shot me in the hip so I couldn't follow—but when I heard the ladies scream, I tried to crawl to the door! Ach, Himmel, the devils I wish I had the legs to trail 'em!"

Such action being entirely out of the question, the

two Englishmen picked up the wounded storekeeper and carried him to his bunk while he told them the incidents of the hold-up, learning, in turn of Henri's murder.

"It's a terrible thing to say—but I'm glad in a way," he finally declared. "This will be the finish of Badeye and his gang of Hold-up men! Cawdor will take their trail and chase them into the Beaufort Sea, if he can't catch the fiends! He's the one man who can do it!"

And, though the storekeeper's prophecy was to come true, neither he nor the men who heard it had any idea of the blood that was to be shed before the round-up of the Hold-up Men of Barren Lands was accomplished!

"But if the gang has been terrorizing the country so long, why hasn't Cawdor got after them before?" demanded Forrest.

"Because they have never pulled off any of their tricks in his territory—that's why. But now, you just wait—you just wait! He'll get them—and you ladies, too!"

"Amen to that!" exclaimed Ponsonby. And while the Englishmen made Fielder as comfortable as they could, he regaled them with stories of the raids and brutality of Badeye and his band.

When at last they had finished their ministrations, they left the storekeeper and went out to examine the guns and put things into shape for the night.

Busily were they engaged in the task when they were startled to hear a grunt!

Turning, they beheld the form of a magnificent specimen of Indian standing in the door.

Chagrined to think the redskin had been able to steal upon them without their even suspecting that any one was in the neighborhood, they stared blankly at him, ignorant of whether he was friend or foe.

"Where Dutchie?" the newcomer finally demanded.

"In bed—he's been shot in the hip," announced Ponsonby.

"Who shot him?"

"Badeye and his gang!"

"Heap devil, him! By gar, he get money, too?"

"Every cent Fielder had in his box which came this morning."

At the words, the Indian's face was overspread with a look of awful fury and for a moment he was speechless, then burst into a torrent of wild curses.

"By gar! Big Moose get him Badeye!" he finally grunted, shaking his scalping knife significantly. "Pale-face know where him went, up, down."

"Up the lake, Baptiste said, down" returned Forrest.

"Where Ba'teest?" asked the Indian, the mention of the guide seeming to give him an idea.

"Gone to bring back Inspector Cawdor and the four constables who are with him. They came up this morning with the pay box."

"Huh! Where 'Enri?"

"Murdered!"

"By gar! Badeye, him devil—but Big Moose get him—get Big Moose money and Badeye heart and scalp! Goodbye."

The Englishmen, however, did not wish to let so evidently a powerful ally leave them alone and Ponsonby exclaimed:

"Hold on a minute, Big Moose. Badeye took our—"

"Hye Moose, come in my room," interrupted the voice of the storekeeper before the other could finish his statement—for, though he was not aware of it, the announcement that the bandits had kidnapped two gentlewomen would have been the worse possible thing he could have said.

At the sound of the German's voice, the Indian turned and entered the room.

"How much did the company owe you, Moose?" he asked.

"Four hundred dollar. By gar, Big Moose going to get him, too! Track Badeye and cut him heart out!"

"I sure hope you will—get your money back, I mean. But don't be in too much of a hurry to go. Without Baptiste or Henri here, and with me laid up, we need some one around who knows the place. You stay, my friends pay you well."

"Indeed we will," declared Forrest. "Anything you want. When any one can steal up on us the way you did, we aren't safe."

This praise of his woodmanship was sweet to the ears of the redskin and he grinned in delight but he did not relish the thought of losing all the money due him from his furs.

"How much you pay?" he finally inquired.

"How much do you want?" countered Ponsonby.

"What comp'ny owe Big Moose."

"Good—we'll give it to you."

Ere the pact could be ratified, however, there came a crash of glass and an object rolled across the floor.

CHAPTER VIII.

LORD FORREST MAKES REPLY TO BADEYE.

With a volley of oaths, the Indian whirled, saw that the object had been hurled through the window on the lake side of the stockade, then dashed out the front door and down to the water.

But when he stepped into his canoe to give pursuit to the one whose outline he could just discern as it skimmed the surface of the lake, he was first amazed then almost crazed to feel it sink under him—Badeye

had succeeded in cutting two long slits in its bottom!

Howling, Big Moose ran his hand under his canoe—and the cause of its strange action was instantly apparent.

His rage was momentarily forgotten, however, at a hail from the stockade, and running in, he beheld Forrest, his face almost purple with anger, holding a strip of birch bark in his hand.

"Do you know where the jack pine by Digger brook is, Big Moose?" he chortled.

"Uhuh."

"Will you go there with a message for me?"

"What for?"

"Never mind, answer me!"

"How much money paleface give?"

"How far is it?"

"Five mile."

"Ten dollars."

"How soon Big Moose get money?"

"The minute you get back."

"Uhuh, Injun go. What to say or do?"

"Just put a note we shall give you in a conspicuous place, I mean one where it can be plainly seen," he added as he noted the look of surprise the word brought to his face.

"All right, Big Moose go. What note say?"

Again, before either of the Englishmen could speak, the storekeeper interrupted by asking:

"What were you yelling so about down at the lake, Moose?"

The ruin of his canoe thus recalled to his mind, the Indian explained the cutting between strings of curses, finally announcing that he would go down and bring it up to the stockade where he could learn whether or not it was worth while trying to mend it.

No sooner had he left the room than Fielder turned to his companions.

"I haven't had the chance before to tell you—but don't let Moose get any idea there are any women in the party with you, or more properly with Badeye."

"But why not?"

"Because he might take it into his head to run off with them—and, while it's bad enough to have them in the hands of the bandits, it is like being at home compared with what it would be to fall into the clutches of the Indians in this part of the country!"

"But how can we fool him? He may insist upon hearing the note?" exclaimed Ponsonby.

"Tell him they are your younger brothers. All he has to do is to deliver your answer at the jack pine—and before he learns the truth, Cawdor and his men will have restored the ladies to your protection."

Readily the Englishmen agreed to this arrangement—yet despite their care, Big Moose discovered that there were two white women with the Hold-up Men!

Somewhat recovered from the surprise occasioned

by the delivery of the note and the shock of its contents, Forrest read it for a second time—and as he did so, his jaw fell.

"What's the trouble, *now*, Hugh? Overlook anything?"

"Apparently. We can't use Big Moose as a substitute for Baptiste."

"Why not?" demanded both the Englishman and the storekeeper, in the same breath.

"Because Badeye says particularly that if we are willing to pay the ransom, to send word by Baptiste."

"Well?" queried Ponsonby.

"Why, the blooming bandits will see the difference between Baptiste and Big Moose and they'll be likely to think the Frenchman's gone after the Mounted Police!"

The objection did not seem a valid one to the others, however, and they lost no time in saying so.

"I tell you how you can get round the bally thing, Hugh, just write a note—and Big Moose can leave it at the jack pine, as he expects to!"

This suggestion of a way out of the dilemma was hailed with welcome by his lordship and quickly he set about writing his reply—but when he had got to the greeting, "Sir," he stopped.

"What shall I tell the bounder, Hal?" he asked.

"Just say: 'Sir: Your note received. Mr. Ponsonby and I will gladly pay you the ransom demanded upon delivery of Lady Forrest and Mrs. Ponsonby at the Post whence you kidnapped them. As it will take at least ten days for us to obtain the money, however, though we have already despatched a messenger for it, we suggest that you either bring the ladies to the stockade at once and stay here until you receive the money or that you allow us to join you so that we may be certain no harm will come to our wives.' Then sign it 'Forrest.'"

"But he'll be too wise a lad to bring them to the Post, Hal," protested the other. "It looks too much like a clumsy way to invite him into a trap."

"True enough—yet he may fall for the other suggestion, that we go to him. It will probably give him the idea that he will be able to hold the both of us for a still more exorbitant ransom."

"And we'd be in a pretty pickle, then."

"Don't you understand, old chap, that my one idea is to play for time against the return of Cawdor and his constables? If the fellow won't agree to either of our propositions, he may offer another himself and, by being a bit clever, we can prolong the negotiations until some time to-morrow when the M. Ps. certainly will be here!"

"Great head, Hal, great head!" ejaculated Forrest. And without more ado, he wrote the answer as his friend had outlined it, finishing just as the Indian returned.

make out the form of the canoe going away from them, they were unable to see where the person propelling it was.

Rushing to the outlet of the brook at the first alarm, Badeye asked a few hurried questions, then picked Lady Forrest out of the other canoe, stepped into it and bade Redtop follow.

"This may be a trick to rush us—better watch out!" cautioned Slasher.

"Never mind about us, just see that the woman doesn't get away from you!" retorted the bandit-chieftain, as he fairly leaped the canoe over the water with his powerful strokes.

With heartfelt relief, Mrs. Ponsonby heard the swish of the paddle as it was plunged into and withdrawn from the water, for Badeye was not attempting silence in his effort to recover his prisoner, and eagerly she watched the dim outline grow larger and larger.

"Who's got you?" called the leader of the desperadoes, as he was within twenty feet of his quarry.

"An Indian."

"Big Moose—by all that's living!" ejaculated Redtop. "Where is he, lady! Tell me so I can get a shot at the devil!"

"He was at the front end of the canoe, towing it while he swam but I can't see his hand now."

For several minutes, Badeye paddled about, both he and his companion searching the surface of the water for a trace of the Indian—but without avail. And finally they gave up the attempt, taking the stolen canoe with its precious contents and towing it back to the mouth of the brook.

Excitedly, the bandits discussed the probable fate of the redskin—yet he was so near to them that if his shooting irons had not been wet he could have moved them down, one by one!

Realizing that it would be impossible for him to carry out his plan of running off with the white woman, when he heard the second canoe in pursuit of him, Big Moose had abandoned his attempt and, diving, he swam as great a distance as he was able under water and then came to the surface more than a rod from where he went down.

Pausing only long enough to get his breath, he repeated the performance until he gained the shore. And as he did so, his cunning again asserted itself.

"Big Moose get twenty dollar, *then* get paleface squaws!" he told himself. And chuckling inwardly, he made a wide detour, approached the jack pine tree, placed the wet but still intact envelope in a cleft in the bark and set out on his return to the stockade!

CHAPTER X.

BADYEY DECIDES TO DOUBLE ON HIS TRACKS.

"Funny Ponsonby and his nobs didn't make any attempt to answer your note, Badeye," exclaimed Pieface after the excitement had blown over, in the effort to divert his chief's mind that he might not be called to ask for his remissness in allowing the Indian to steal into the midst of the camp.

"How do you know he hasn't? Been up to see?" returned Badeye.

"Why, no."

"Then suppose you and Slasher go up to the jack pine and find out—it would be just my accursed luck if Baptiste were to have come when we were all watching the lake. Step lively, but keep your eyes and ears open so you won't walk into any trap."

Hastily the bandits left the beach, proceeding with the utmost caution as they approached the rendezvous but not a suspicious sound did they hear and at last they ventured to peep forth from the fringe of bushes behind which they were concealed.

As his eyes caught sight of the bit of white against the tree trunk, Pieface nudged his pal.

"There it is, there's the answer!" he breathed in Slasher's ear. "The old man was right, the Frenchie come while we was all down at the water."

"Yes, I reckon he's been here, right enough—but don't you place too big a bet on the fact that he's gone. The fellows down at the Post may want to get a line on how many there are of us. It's my opinion that Big Moose's trick was for just that purpose."

Impressed with the plausibility of this idea, Pieface was wondering how it would be safest to approach the tree to get the note when his companion solved the problem.

Taking his double-edged dirk from its sheath, Slasher picked out a straight sapling, cut it, trimmed it and then made a slit in the small end.

This done, he dropped to his belly and began to work himself forward, snake like, through the grass and bushes until he was within two feet of the base of the tree. Pausing to learn if he could hear a sound which would indicate that other than friendly eyes had watched his advance, he cautiously raised the slit-ended stick up the tree trunk until the latter rested in the slot, then gave it a sudden twist and brought the letter to the ground.

So excited and elated was he at his success in securing the note without being detected that he never noticed the paper was sopping wet.

But when he delivered it to Badeye, the bandit-chieftain snapped:

"What happened to you, fall into the brook?"

"No, why?" demanded the man he had sent to the jack pine, in chorus.

"No use canoe—walk," grunted the redskin. "Note ready?"

"Yes. Here it is."

But before Big Moose could take it, Ponsonby reached out his hand, and grasped it.

"Better put it in an envelope, Hugh. It'll look more dignified." And going out into the storeroom, he quickly returned with the wrapper.

"How'll I address the cur?"

"Don't address him at all—leave it blank. Now, Big Moose, I'll double the price if you'll get back here in an hour."

"Sho!" grunted the redskin, seizing the letter and setting out.

But though they waited anxiously, Big Moose did not come back!

CHAPTER IX.

BIG MOOSE'S TREACHERY.

Enraged at the loss of his canoe, the crafty Indian determined to appropriate the one belonging to the bandit-chieftain and he also told himself that if he had half a chance, he would recover not only the money due him from the Fur company, but that which should have paid to the other trappers.

And as he thought of the enjoyment he could have with so many dollars, his anger gradually vanished.

Yet he was to be balked in both his plans—though he made a discovery which proved of far more moment to him!

When Badeye had returned from hurling his demand for the enormous ransom through the window of the stockade, he rejoined his companions at the jack pine.

"How shall we camp?" asked Slasher. "On the bank of the brook, near the tree?"

"And lay ourselves open to getting captured?" snorted Redtop. "Boy, you talk like a fool."

"If you've got a better plan out—"

"Cut out this quarreling!" snapped their chief. "Redtop's right, there's no use in running unnecessary risks. We'll put the ladies in the canoes and keep them in the water so we can make a quick getaway—if we should be obliged to.

"Redtop, you and Pieface will stand guard over them and I'll take Slasher with me up to the tree. As I reckon we'll have an answer right soon, we'll just make things ready now."

Realizing that protest would be vain, the prisoners made none and were soon ensconced in the canoes bound hand and foot, while their guards took up positions on the shore some ten feet away, after which the bandit-chieftain and his pal went to the rendezvous where they hid in a dense clump of underbrush.

Boldly Big Moose travelled the trail until he was within fifty yards of the jack pine when he turned toward the lake, bringing into play all the proverbial cunning of his race in worming his way to the water's edge without so much as betraying his presence by the snapping of a twig.

And as he gained the shore, he drew himself to his full height and looked toward the mouth of Digger Brook. As he caught sight of the outlines of the two canoes riding so silently on the lake his heart beat the faster—and instantly crouching till he was no taller than the reeds, began his stealthy approach.

Never even dreaming that an attempt at rescue might be made from the lake, Redtop and Pieface sat with their faces toward the towering pine tree, straining their ears to catch the first word which should announce the arrival of the messenger from the Post.

But Mrs. Ponsonby was more alert!

Cautiously she had raised herself until her head was above the gunwales of the canoe and when she found that her act was not noticed—or if it were, not objected to—she managed to draw herself along until she could lean against the end of the craft.

And she was in this position when she suddenly beheld the head and shoulders of a man loom close beside her from the weeds.

Believing that it was either her husband or Lord Forrest, she waited until the figure was almost upon her and then breathed:

"Harold!"

But the effect of her exclamation was vastly different from that she expected!

A moment, there was tense silence, then a sudden leap forward and she felt the end of the canoe being shoved out into the lake while a voice chuckled:

"Paleface squaw, huh? Big Moose don't want twenty dollar when get paleface squaw!"

At the discovery that she was being the victim of a second kidnapping, the Englishwoman was rendered speechless for the moment, then, realizing that anything would be preferable to capture by an Indian, she shouted:

"Help! Help!"

Instantly Redtop and Pieface were on their feet and rushing to the water.

Furious at the frustration of his scheme, the redskin, who was at the end of the craft away from shore first thought of shooting the woman as she sat in the canoe, then his desire to carry her to his wigwam overcame his thirst for vengeance and he made a desperate effort to draw the boat with him out into the lake, trusting to luck that those on shore would not dare shoot at him for fear of hitting the woman instead, because of the semi-darkness.

Such was, indeed, the case for though they could

"Because the letter is water soaked."

"By thunder! I have it!" cried Redtop. "His nobbs used Big Moose as his messenger and the cuss doubled back on us when he found he couldn't get away with the canoe and left the note."

"Reckon you're right, boy," declared his leader. "Just light one of our candles and hold it under your coat while I read what the men have to say."

Quickly Pieface obeyed and though the outlaws could not get the chance to read the note, the expression that settled on Badeye's face was sufficient to tell them that his plan had not worked out to his liking—and this opinion was confirmed when he read it aloud.

"They must think we *are* simple-minded!" snarled Slasher. "Too bad you couldn't have sent word back that you'd take the women down to Fort Rae and stay there until the ginks got their coin!"

"But that ain't such a bad proposition about having 'em come up here and join their wives," hazarded Redtop. "We ought to make another good piece of money on them, eh, Badeye?"

"Not much. They're evidently up to something and are simply sparring for time—any fool would know I wouldn't accept either of their offers. But there's no good in trying to dope out what was in their minds—we've got too much to attend to right here."

"Meaning?" asked Slasher.

"That we're going to have Big Moose and his whole band of braves on our trails within twenty-four hours and that it's up to us to hustle and get out of the way."

"But how can we arrange about the ransom if we duck?" protested Pieface.

"That'll keep—when the guys see we don't fall for their game, they'll take another tack. Besides, if we hang round here, the bucks may be down on us any moment, rush us, seize the girls and vamoose—and then we won't have any one to ransom."

Against this logic there was no argument, for all the Hold-up men well knew the longing of the redskins for white squaws and the lengths to which they would go to obtain them, and they contented themselves with asking in which direction they were going.

For some time, however, the bandit-chieftain did not reply to the question, going over in his mind the advantages and disadvantages of the various hiding places he maintained for his gang.

At last, he announced:

"We'll go back down the lake and hit for the dungeon."

This reply caused amazement among his men, which they were not slow to show.

"But that's almost under the guns of Fort Rae!" protested Redtop.

"So much the better—for the women. If anything happens to us, they will be able to get to the Fort with-

out much danger—just remember, it isn't from the sojers or Mounted Police our danger will come so much as from Big Moose and his bucks. And between providing a scalp to dangle from some redskin's belt and doing my piece in prison, I'll take the latter.

"But we ain't caught yet—and with any sort of luck, we won't be! Stow the grub in the canoes and we'll make our start as soon as we can."

Pieface, however, was determined to make one more effort to dissuade his chief from his avowed purpose.

"Ain't the boys who are raiding down in Athabasca planning on making a run for the dungeon when things get too hot for them?" he asked.

"What of it?"

"Why, if they should happen to come along while we was being besieged, they'd like as not fall into an ambush. If they don't we'll be packed in like sardines in a case."

"All of which don't amount to shucks," retorted Badeye. "I only hope we do find some of the boys when we get there. Four men against all that his nibs will send out to find his wife, and with the necessity of fighting Injuns at the same time, ain't an overwhelming force."

"But there's no use arguing—I said we would go to the Dungeon—and to the dungeon we go!"

Aware of the futility of further talk, the others finally consented to the idea and without more delay, they entered the canoes and began to paddle back on the course up which they had just come.

CHAPTER XI.

CONSTABLE O'TOOLE'S WAGER.

Spurred on by the incentive of earning ten thousand dollars—more money than he had ever dared hoped to own—Baptiste sped over the ground with amazing rapidity in his effort to overtake the members of the Royal Northwest Mounted Police who had escorted the pay box of the Fur company to the Post on Lake Rey. And thanks to the fact that one of the horses had gone very lame and that the constabulary met several trappers who gave them alarming reports, they were advancing very slowly.

Not ten miles had they proceeded when Inspector Cawdor had come across an old trapper by the name of Lafitte.

"Where away, old bearman?" asked the inspector, drawing rein.

"To the Post."

"Why?"

"To get my money before Badeye and his man do."

This reply caused the constables to look at one another in surprise and after their significant exchange of glances, Cawdor continued:

"What makes you think the Hold-up Men are on the warpath?"

"'Cause, Pierre, he done seen 'em yesterday morning and he come over to me and told me to draw his money."

"Oh, Pierre is always having scares. The last I heard of Badeye, he was rustling cattle down near the Montana border. I don't believe he's within a couple of hundred miles of the place."

"Mebbe so, mebbe not. Still, I t'ink I go and get my monee and Pierre's. It's there, ain't it?"

"It certainly is. We brought it up from the Fort and delivered it to Fielder not more than a couple of hours ago."

As the old trapper heard this definite statement that the pay had arrived from the Fur company, he lost no time in setting out on his way again and as he disappeared up the trail, the Inspector watched him with an amused smile.

"That just goes to show what the reputation for being a bad-man will do to peaceable men and women. Just because Badeye is known as the leader of the Hold-up men and his haunts are supposed to be the Barren Lands, every time one of the trappers sees a strange man, he immediately jumps to the conclusion that it must be the desperado or some of his band."

"Still it's possible that Pierre is right," asserted Constable O'Toole. "I've known both Pierre and Lafitte for going on five years—and I know their eyesight is good, I wish mine were half as strong, and I know that they aren't subject to the scares that strike most of the people in this part of the country."

"Oh, well, you were always prone to look on the black side of things, O'Toole," laughed his superior. "Now let's forget Badeye and his gang."

But though they tried bravely so to do, they were unable.

Within five miles after they had passed Lafitte, they came across another trapper, Jardine.

"Have you seen Badeye and his men?" he asked, as he saluted the squad of Mounted Police.

"No, are they in this part of the country?" returned the inspector.

"That they are, worse luck."

"What makes you think so?"

"White-face, one of Big Moose's bucks was over to my shack yesterday and he said he'd seen 'em paddling up the lake yesterday afternoon. And glad I am it was up instead of down he saw the devils—or I wouldn't be expecting to find my money at the Post."

"Well, it's there, all right," replied Cawdor. But as the woodsman resumed the trail, the inspector was not as light-hearted as before.

From putting his horses at a smart trot, he held them down to a walk and as they noticed the change in the gait, the constables whispered among themselves. Of a sudden, Cawdor drew rein.

"I may have been mistaken, men," he exclaimed contritely. "There's evidently some basis for the rumor that Badeye's in this part of the country. And if he is, it's our chance to make a name for Fort Rae by rounding him up. Let's dismount and have a bite of grub—and then we'll go back to the Post. What with the pay Dutchie has received and the presence of the two ladies at the stockade, it would sure tempt the leader of the Hold-up men—if he knew the facts."

This change in their plans suited the constables to a "T" and willingly they drew rein, dismounted and partook of a hearty lunch.

No one mentioned the bandits, however, and as the memory of them rather wore away, the Inspector became less and less inclined to retrace his steps, fearful lest the superintendent at the Fort should reprimand him for a "fraid-cat."

But when he announced this last change of mind, he met a vigorous objection from his constables.

"I've a hunch, Inspector, that we're needed at the Post this very minute!" declared O'Toole.

"Oh, Barney, Barney, if anything were needed to make me determine to keep on to the Fort instead of going back, it would be the fact that you've had one of your hunches."

Merry was the laughter that greeted this comment upon the imagination of the genial constable but O'Toole was not disabused of his idea by it.

"That's all right, you can laugh if you want to, but I'm willing to bet me year's pay that if we go back to the Fort there'll be a runner in from Lake Rey before morning after us to go back!"

So serious was the man as he made this statement—for all his fellow members of the mounted Police knew that he worshipped a dollar almost as devoutly as he did his maker—that they dropped their banter.

"Tell you what I'll do," finally exclaimed the inspector.

"Fire away," chorused the others.

"I'll agree to wait here until midnight—if no runner comes from Dutchie by that time, Barney'll sign over his pay for a year to the four of us. What do you say, Barney?"

"That it's a poor bargain that ain't got two sides to it—what do I get if a runner does come? The pay of all of yez for a year?"

"Make it half the pay," returned Cawdor.

"I'll take yez!" declared the constable so quickly that it surprised his comrades of the force.

"Oh, Barney, me lad, it's a rare good thing that you're a saving man and will have enough to live on for a year when we're drawing your pay and smoking

at your expense," chuckled Canton, who was a Scotchman, and the others indulged their fancy in declaring what they would do with the extra money they received.

As the afternoon wore away and night came on, the inspector posted a picket and built a fire around which the other members of the Mounted Police sat, talking and smoking.

But of a sudden they were brought to their feet by the challenge of the picket: "Who goes there?"

CHAPTER XII.

THE TROUBLES OF THE ENGLISHMEN INCREASE.

Never waiting for the reply, Cawdor and his men, guns at their shoulders, hastened toward their companion in the trail—but as they reached him, they heard a voice cry:

"It's me, Baptiste, trapper from the Lake Rey Post. Who are you?"

Not knowing whether the men who were disputing the way with him were friends or foes, the halfbreed had jumped into the bushes the instant he had heard the challenge but in the hope that he might have overtaken the members of the Mounted Police Squad he had answered.

"We're the Royal North-West Mounted Police!" rang out the voice of the sentry. "You're safe Baptiste."

But upon this statement came the words of the inspector:

"Come show yourself, man. What's wrong?"

"Badeye's raided the Post!" cried the trapper-guide, emerging from his hiding place into the trail.

"Did he get the money?" asked Cawdor.

"Yes—and the ladies too! He and his men kil——"

But the inspector did not wait for the messenger to finish.

"To horse! To horse!" he shouted. "Canton, as your mount's lame, you go on to the Fort and tell the Superintendent that I want twenty more men. Have them come to the Post. If I'm not there, I'll leave word where you can hit my trail."

"Hadn't I best hear all Baptiste can tell, sir, then I can make a better report."

"All right. Speak lively, Baptiste, we don't want to linger long here."

"Badeye, he done kill my pard, Henri, shoot Dutchie in the ear and the hip and clean up all and when he'd done that, he grabbed ze ladies."

"By thundér! To think such a thing has been pulled off in our territory, men!" exclaimed the inspector.

"We've got to redeem ourselves—and there's only one

way, to round-up the leader of the Hold-up Men of Barren Lands.

"Baptiste, swing up behind me. Canton, push your horse to the limit!

"Forward, gallop!"

With a will, the constables set their horses at top speed, threading the winding trail with infinite skill and showing their bravery by the pace at which they rode in the dark.

And at about the same time the four members of the Royal North-west Mounted Police started to the aid of the distressed and sacked Post on Lake Rey, Big Moose returned from his mission to the jack pine tree.

Noting his drenched condition, Ponsonby exclaimed:

"Did you have a fight with the devils?"

On the tip of his tongue did the buck have it to deny the suggestion, then his cunning came to his relief and, determined to hide his treachery in a blare of lies, he replied:

"Uhuh! Badeye, him up to trick. When Big Moose got to jack pine, him jump out and begin shoot.

"Big Moose crouch down and sneak for lake. Badeye and him paleface follow, shooting all time. But Big Moose fool 'em—and bullets no hit, byme bye get to lake, jump in and swim off!"

"But Lady Forrest and Mrs. Ponsonby, did you see them or hear them?" asked the husband of the former, anxiously.

At this question, which his worry caused him to ask, both the storekeeper and his travelling companion grunted in dismay, for it revealed the very facts which they had desired to keep from the redskin.

And no sooner had the nobleman beheld the look of gloating cunning which flashed in the Cree chieftain's eyes at the mention of the ladies than he cursed himself roundly for his mistake. But it was too late to remedy it and all the men in the stockade listened eagerly for the buck's reply.

"Big Moose don't know which um was but him seen one paleface squaw, tall and dark."

"That's Judith!" declared Forrest. "Oh, where was Angela that she wasn't with her? You don't suppose the devils have harmed her, Fielder?"

"Not much—after the note Badeye wrote you. What was Mrs. Ponsonby doing, Moose?"

"Sleeping."

"By the jack pine?"

"No, what you think, Badeye heap fool, all same other paleface?"

"Aha, then you took a little prow through the camp, eh?" exclaimed the storekeeper. "Get any scalps?"

"Nix!" growled the Cree chieftain, his face growing terrible to behold.

"Then how did you come to find her?"

"Went up by water." Then, evidently fearing that

the cross-questioning of the men might become embarrassing, he exclaimed: "Big Moose want um twenty dollar!"

"But you haven't brought any answer back!" protested Ponsoby. "How do we know that you delivered the note?"

In reply, the redskin pointed to his dripping clothes.

"But you might have gone out into the lake back of the stockade, thrown the letter away and then ducked yourself."

At this evident disbelief of the story he had so carefully thought out on his return from his inglorious attempt to run off with the woman in the canoe, Big Moose grew furious.

"Give Big Moose twenty dollar—or paleface be sorry!" he thundered.

"But——" began Forrest, when the storekeeper interrupted.

"That's what you had better do," he declared, at the same time winking significantly.

"Oh, very well, if you think it's fair to promise to bring us back an answer and then not even give us an assurance that our note has been delivered," snapped the nobleman.

"I certainly do—I know Big Moose!" exclaimed Fielder—and there was that in his tone which caused the Englishman to look at him. And what they read in his eyes caused them both to put their hands in their pockets and draw forth a piece of gold which they gave to him.

Pausing only to bite the coins, the Indian dropped them into the neck of his shirt, grunted and passed from the room.

"You've made a bad piece of business of this, my lord," exclaimed Fielder, as soon as the redskin was out of hearing.

"What do you mean?" demanded the nobleman, startled.

"You've not only given away the fact that there are white women with Badeye but by disbelieving his story, no matter how impossible it sounded, you've made Big Moose your enemy!"

CHAPTER XIII.

PURSUED AND PURSUERS PASS.

In blank dismay, the two Englishmen looked at one another as they heard the words of the storekeeper.

"What do you mean by making him an enemy?" finally demanded Lord Forrest.

"Simply that. I warned you not to let him know, under any conditions that there were white women

with the bandits and yet you not only do that but you threaten not to give him the money you promised in return for his taking the note to the spot designated by Badeye—as a consequence, I don't doubt for a minute that he will go to his village, gather his braves and take the outlaws' trail in an effort to snatch the ladies from them.

"No matter how much you disbelieve an Injun, you must never let him know it—when you are playing the under hand!"

"As it is, until Baptiste returns, if he ever does, you are practically helpless. I am unable to be of any assistance and if you should go a hundred rods from the stockade you would be hopelessly lost!"

As the storekeeper uttered these unvarnished truths, the Englishmen gazed at one another, then Lord Forrest leaped to his feet and started toward the door through which the disgruntled buck had so recently passed.

"I'll call him back!" he exclaimed.

"No, no!" protested Fielder, raising up one arm in his anxiety to prevent such a deed. "You made your bed, now lie in it! If you called Big Moose back—and he came—he would know that you were afraid of him and he'd do absolutely as he pleased. You'd never know whether or not you could depend on him."

"No, my lord, the only thing to do now is to wait for Cawdor and his men."

With anything but good grace, the Englishmen accepted the outcome of their rashness and smoking and drinking they strove to while away the hours of terrible suspense.

But had they chanced to look out upon Lake Rey as they moped in the stockade, some half hour after Big Moose had left in his rage, they would have seen two canoes stealing silently and cautiously toward the South!

Unlike their positions when they had been taken up the lake to the dug-out, when they returned, the two women were allowed to sit up.

But Badeye was destined to repent his kindness!

As the glimmer of light from the window in Fielders room flickered across the mirror-like surface of the water, Lady Forrest suddenly shouted:

"There's the stockade, Judith! Oh, Hugh! Hu-ug——"

But before she could raise her voice to a pitch that would give it sufficient carrying power to reach the shore, Redtop clapped his hand over her mouth, stifling the cry in her throat.

"Another sound from either of you and I'll put a bullet through you!" hissed the bandit-chieftain. And dropping his paddle, he whipped his sixshooters into the air, holding them so that the light glinted on their barrels.

"I ought to do it, anyhow," he continued more to himself than to his companions. "There's enough money in the pay we got to keep us comfortable for

the rest of the summer—and by trying to raise more money on you two women, we're only getting ourselves into trouble!"

But how grave was the trouble, neither the notorious leader of the Hold-up men of Barren Lands or his pals in crime knew!

His words, however, had the effect of silencing the women, as he had intended, and not so much as a question did they ask during the remainder of the trip.

In order to reach the subterranean cave, which the bandits called the dungeon, it was necessary for the men in the canoes to land about ten miles below the Post and then take their way through the forest.

Two trails there were, one winding in and out through underbrush and over rocks, the other the one leading to Fort Rae—and out of consideration for his prisoners, Badeye chose the latter.

Yet his kindness for a second time came near to proving his undoing.

When they had effected their landing and safely stored their canoes where they would not only be ready for any sudden emergency, should they chance to come by the lake again, but were out of sight of even the keenest eyes, Badeye had formed his line of march with Pieface in the lead followed by Redtop, Mrs. Ponsonby, Lady Forrest, Slasher and himself.

For more than two hours they trudged over the uneven trail, making scarcely more than a snail's pace owing to the extreme weariness of the prisoners, when suddenly Pieface stopped, listened, then rushed back to his chief.

"They're coming!" he gasped.

"Who?" demanded Lady Forrest.

But before any of his men could speak, Badeye hissed:

"Silence! I'll rap any one over the head who speaks! Into the bushes on the left, lively and quiet!"

Placing their hands roughly over the mouths of their captives to prevent any outcry, Badeye and Slasher carried them out of the trail.

But so close had the two parties that were travelling the trail been to one another—owing to a sharp turn in the path, that the bandits barely had time to conceal themselves when up dashed four members of the Royal North-west Mounted Police who had been summoned by Baptiste.

Scarcely daring to breathe lest they might betray their presence to the very men from whom they most desired to escape, the outlaws watched the horsemen dash by—and as the last one passed they uttered heartfelt sighs of relief.

But barely had they left their throats than every man of them shook like a leaf!

Lady Forrest had also been staring at the passing riders and her eyes had beheld a flash of red.

"That's the uniform of the Mounted Police, Judith!" she cried. "Quick, let's hail them!"

Again Badeye and Slasher clapped their hands over the mouths of their prisoners—and this time in no gentle manner.

But even in so dire an extremity, the bandit-chieftain did not lose his head.

Instead, when his life and the lives of his men were in danger, he showed his resourcefulness by exclaiming:

"Those men aren't constables—they're Injuns! If you let them hear you, you're lost!"

"But you surely wouldn't allow the fiends to carry us off!" protested Lady Forrest.

"Don't you flatter yourself, madam. I'd gladly sell you to them to save the necks of my men and myself!"

CHAPTER XIV.

BADYEY PLACES HIS "SILENT SENTINELS."

Nothing could have showed the proud Englishwoman so clearly as these words the utter lack of regard in which the leader of the bandits held her, and as she realized the fact, she lapsed into silence which was not broken until she was being lowered into the Dungeon, some three hours later.

"What sort of a place is this?" she demanded, with a bit of her former fire.

"It's going to be your home until your Lord and master sends for you—or rather sends the fifty thousand dollars for you, my lady," chuckled Badeye.

"What, you expect *me* to live in a hole in the ground?" protested the arrogant beauty.

"I should think it would be preferable to a hot, stuffy wigwam."

"Preposterous! I never heard of such indignities being heaped upon two women!"

The protests of the noblewoman had no effect upon the bandits, however, and raising the trap rock which gave entrance to the subterranean cave, they quickly lowered her. But when they were all once inside and Lady Forrest still kept up her tirade of abuse, Badeye exclaimed:

"Now see here! I've heard all the talk I want out of you! If you open your head again until you are spoken to, I'll put a gag in your mouth and keep it there day in and day out, removing it only when you are obliged to eat, which will be once a day, until your husband either ransoms you or I decide to sell you to the Injuns!"

This awful threat had the result of stopping the wagging of the noblewoman's tongue and she subsided

in a silence that was welcomed by every member of the desperate band.

The trap rock having been slipped back into place when the bandits had entered, Redtop had lighted a flambeau and its rays revealed an interior vastly different from that which the two Englishwomen had expected.

The floor was covered with beautiful rugs made from the skins of animals indigenous to the region and the walls were hung with silks which bore the inimitable embroidery of the Chinese while all about were firearms and knives of every sort and description.

"But where do you sleep and do your cooking?" inquired Mrs. Ponsonby, staring about her at her surroundings as though she were gazing at some scene from the Arabian nights.

"We have other rooms for that—the dungeon is quite an extensive establishment," smiled Badeye.

And indeed it was for it consisted of three other rooms beside the one in which they were, a kitchen, and two sleeping rooms.

But the bandit-chieftain did not propose to let his prisoners into all the secrets of his underground retreat and calling his men to him, he said, in a tone so low that the women could not hear his words:

"When you have occasion to go into any of the other rooms, don't use the secret doors. Go up to the surface and then down. I'm going to give this room to the women. They can't do any harm here—and unless I'm all off, we're going to have some lively work cut out for us when Big Moose and his braves locate us!"

"But if we should be killed, the women would starve to death," protested Slasher.

"Don't worry about that. Even if we all are done up, there are the other boys who are due here day after tomorrow, so they'll be safe enough."

"That makes me think, oughtn't we to warn Buster and Easy and Long Hair of the danger we're in?" inquired Pieface.

"Sure we ought—but they're no fools. And it would be a heap sight easier to locate a flea in a haymow than them. Now you boys come up with me and we'll prepare some grub."

Quickly the men obeyed and as they mounted the ladder one after another, Badeye called to his prisoners:

"Don't be alarmed, ladies. We're not going far, only to cook you some food. This room is to be yours as long as you do us the honor to stay with us. None of us will enter it again—unless in a case of direst necessity. Even your food will be lowered to you."

And without giving the astonished women the opportunity to protest against being left alone in a room underground, the bandit-chieftain scrambled up the ladder and rejoined his companions in the kitchen, which was entered by a second trap similar to that leading to the big dungeon.

Helping themselves copiously to liquor which was in the kitchen in quantities, the men soon fell to talking about the methods to which they should resort to protect themselves from the Mounted Police.

"We're safe enough from them," declared Badeye, when all the others had offered suggestions. "It's the Injuns of whom I'm the most afraid. And there's only one way to find out when they are skulking about."

"How's that?" demanded Redtop and Slasher, together.

"By setting wolf traps in the trails leading to the dungeon."

The wicked cunning of this scheme caused the outlaws to gasp with amazement, then they expressed their hearty approval and, that they might put the plan into immediate operation, Pieface went into one of the bunk rooms and returned carrying three big, steel traps with serrated edges.

"Wash 'em up clean," admonished his leader. "They all caught their wolves—and them bucks have got a scent that could locate them in a minute."

Thus adjured, the desperadoes lost no time in scouring the terrible instruments with sand and water while Badeye prepared some bacon and eggs and coffee.

As soon as the food was ready, the men ate their share of it and then, taking the portions for their prisoners and the traps, they ascended to the surface.

"I want you all to come with me so you can see where I plant our 'silent sentinels,'" declared the notorious outlaw, when the food had been lowered into the dig dungeon. "And if any of you have occasion to go out, be mighty careful you don't run foul of them."

The warning, however, was superfluous for they all knew the terrible power of the pieces of steel and without more ado, they went to work placing them under their piles of leaves, so that they gave the effect of stones covered, in the three trails leading to the retreat.

Suddenly, as they set the last "silent sentinel" Redtop stood up and sniffed.

"I smell horses!" he whispered.

"Injun or M. P.?" asked Pieface.

But before the outlaw could reply, a bullet pinged through the air close above their heads.

CHAPTER XV.

THE STRUGGLE TO THE DEATH.

In consternation, the bandits gazed at one another until Badeye breathed:

"Down on your bellies! Worm your way toward the trap to my bunkroom, that's behind a little hill which will cut us off from the view of whoever's attacking!"

No second command did the men need and with the stealth of snakes, they wriggled to the entrance to the bunk room and then dropped down to the floor.

Yet before they had time to close the secret stone, a terrible yell broke on the air!

"Ha! Ha! One of my 'silent sentinels' has already got to work!" chuckled Badeye. "We didn't get them set a minute too soon, boys!"

Readily did the others understand this and as they heard the agonized shrieks of the victim the wolf trap had caught, they danced with glee.

"Shall we go up and see who we've got?" asked Redtop, eagerly, putting one foot on the ladder as he spoke.

"Not yet. There may be others in the scouting party. We'll wait fifteen minutes and if the yells still continue, we'll take a peep!"

With the best patience they could summon, the band-

its awaited the allotted time and when the screams still continued unabated, Badeye gave the word to ascend.

But when they beheld their captive, it was the outlaws who were astounded!

Instead of beholding a member of the Mounted Police or an Indian brave, they gazed upon a monstrous gray wolf!

"Beats anything I ever knew or heered of!" ejaculated Redtop, after staring at the captive for several minutes—and his opinion was confirmed by the exclamations of his companions. "If there ever was a shriek that sounded like a human being's, them cries was it!"

And as he spoke, the bandit approached the animal in the trap.

But their captive had not ceased furnishing surprises!

As the outlaw came within a scant yard of the victim, one of its paws was suddenly raised in the air!

Came the flash of a bit of steel—and then putting forth all its strength, the prisoner surged toward Redtop, at the same time bringing down the upraised arm!

Too near had the desperado been to catch the glint of the steel—but his companions had seen it and shouted a warning.

Wondering what was amiss yet realizing that it was no time to question, Redtop jumped backward—and as he did so, the arm descended, burying a long dirk in the ground at the very spot on which he had been standing!

An instant the outlaw gasped and stared in amazed bewilderment, then his sense of self-preservation came to his aid and, with a wicked oath, he threw himself upon the mystery in wolf's skin and bore it to the ground!

But lucky for him was it that his pals were close at hand!

Powerful man though he was, Redtop seemed but a toy in the hands of his antagonist.

Recovering with a skill that was marvelous from his spoiled blow, the wolf-man, despite the fact that one of his legs was held tight in the awful steel jaws of the trap, threw his arms out as the bandit sprang upon him, caught him in a bear-like embrace and lifting him clean off the ground was swinging him round and round with the evident intention of gaining momentum that he might dash his brains out on the ground when Badeye rushed in and with a vicious kick in the stomach sent the man reeling backward!

The inaction shattered by their leader, the other bandits quickly dashed in and though the prisoner in the trap struggled desperately—and for a few minutes succeeded in holding all four of his assailants off—they finally succeeded in tripping him. And as the leg that was held by the trap was bent under him, the task of binding him was comparatively easy.

"Shall we loose him from the steel jaws?" asked Pieface, making ready to pry open the springs.

"Not for a minute!" cried Badeye, hurriedly. "We'll take the whole kit and boodle along to my room. We may be obliged to use the trap to get the fellow to talk!"

At the thought of subjecting a fellow human to such awful torture, the outlaws gazed at their leader in amazement—but his face was inscrutable.

"Hurry!" he snapped, finally. "There may be some one else giving us a call pretty soon."

And, still appalled at the suggestion of the chieftain, the outlaws picked up their prisoner and carried him to the trap door through which he was lowered into the bunkroom.

The moment that the panel rock had been slipped into place, Badeye went up to the wolf-man who was lying on the floor.

"Who are you?" he demanded.

But his only reply was a deep snarl!

So unexpected was this form of answer—and so true to the outraged growl of the gray wolf was it, that the outlaws standing about the prostrate form gasped in terror.

"It can't be an insane man?" hazarded Redtop, in a whisper.

"Perhaps it's Jumping Bull, the crazy man in Big Moose's tribe—you know all Indians look upon insane or demented people as special protégés of the 'great Father.'"

"If it is, we mustn't hurt him," asserted Pieface, emphatically. "If we did, our lives wouldn't be worth a nickel apiece—we'd have every Injun not only in Mackenzie but in every other part of the North-west and even the States after our scalps!"

Even as his men, so was the bandit-chieftain puzzled by the actions of the captive—yet when he realized that the creature's cleverness was beginning to influence the superstitious minds of his men, he determined to act.

"Crazy man,—doodle-bugs!" snorted Badeye. "I'll show you the fellow isn't an insane Injun!" Then, as an idea suddenly flashed through his brain, he added: "Why, I'll bet it's no other than our old friend Big Moose whom we lost on the lake when he tried to run off with my canoe—and Mrs. Ponsonby!"

This suggestion succeeded in stopping the trend of the outlaw's minds to the supernatural by arousing their very active curiosity and as their leader dropped to his knees the better to carry on his investigation, they drew close about him.

Seizing the wolfskin under the jowl, where it was drawn together, Badeye strove to tear it apart but so well was it laced that his efforts were futile—and after two attempts, he drew his double-edged dirk and slashed the hide open.

As he did so, the prisoner gave another exhibition of his titanic strength.

No sooner had he heard the knife cutting the hide than he clenched his fists, threw all possible force into his arms—and burst the pieces of hemp rope that bound them as though they had been bits of thread.

So sudden was the action, that it caught the bandit-chieftain entirely unawares and before he could recover from his surprise, the dirk knife had been wrested from his hands and was being drawn back to plunge into him!

But not for long was the leader of the Hold-up Men of Barren Lands oblivious to the death that was so close to him!

With lightning rapidity, he whipped one of his shooting irons from his belt and without having the time to aim it, pumped every cartridge in its cylinder into the head before him!

And his action had not been an instant too soon!

For even as the blood gushed through the slit he had made in the wolf hide, the point of the knife caught in Badeye's shirt and cut a long rent as he dodged

back to prevent it from entering his flesh!

"By thunder! reckon he's dead this time!" exclaimed Redtop, the first to recover from the stress of the struggle to the death to which they had been unwilling witnesses.

"Well, if it ain't, I'll fix him!" exclaimed Pieface—and before any of his companions could stop him or his chief protest, the bandit sent three bullets crashing into the skull of the man in the wolf trap.

"Stop it! Stop it!" bellowed Badeye, as soon as he realized what his man was doing. "The fellow's dead, don't worry about that—besides, it's only a waste of ammunition to pump lead into a lifeless carcass and you may need your cartridges badly before long!"

And in the light of after events, the outlaws remembered this bloodcurdling statement and wondered if it had been uttered in mockery!

CHAPTER XVI.

THE ROUND-UP OF THE BANDITS BEGINS.

No sooner were they assured that the man with the nigh superhuman strength was dead than the bandits fell upon the body, slicing the wolf pelt into ribbons as they strove to remove it.

Badeye, however, kept the head to himself and as he finally succeeded in removing the hide cried out, gleefully:

"It's Big Moose! I was right! My cricky! But it must have made the buck mad to think that after our getting the dame back from him and then getting to the dungeon that he should have been caught in one of my 'silent sentinels' and finally fall victim to me! No wonder he struggled like a demon!"

"Well, it's sure lucky we've got him out of the way!" exclaimed Redtop. "Every enemy we send to glory makes it just so much the better for us!"

But the bandits were not destined to enjoy the fruits of the slaughter of their enemies!

As soon as they had rifled the pockets of the dead chieftain, in which they found, among other things, the two gold pieces he had received from the Englishmen, Pieface went up to the surface to make sure that no one was lurking in the vicinity. And while he was gone, on his reconnoitre, Badeye wrote out a warning which he pinned to the buckskin shirt of Big Moose.

"Read it! Read it!" clamored his men—and yielding to the entreaties he droned:

"To the braves of Big mooses tribe. big moose come sneaking round my home and i got him. if yu do the same ill get yu, 2 just take my advice and tote of this carcass and then leave me alone -badeye!"

"Wow, but that'll start something and no mistake!" cried Redtop, enthusiastically.

"That's what it's intended to do!" returned the bandit-chieftain. "I only hope they'll get here at the same time the M. P's. do!"

But this wish of the notorious outlaw was not granted—though both the Indians and the Royal North-west Mounted Police found his retreat!

When Pieface had made sure that so far the brush surrounding the dungeon was free from inimical prowlers, he returned to his chief and so reported, after which the body of Big Moose, with its insulting message pinned to the breast, was raised to the surface and carried some ten rods into the forest.

"Set the wolf trap again?" queried Slasher, as they were retracing their steps to the retreat.

"Sure thing—it did good service once and it is likely to again. Bring her up, Redtop."

Quickly did the desperado obey and when the death dealing device had been placed once more beneath a pile of leaves in the trail, the outlaws descended into the bunkroom where, upon the advice of Badeye, they rolled up in their blankets and were soon fast asleep.

But if the Hold-up Man of Barren Lands felt secure enough in their subterranean hiding place to rest themselves, the men who were on their trail neither wished nor were able so to do.

In blissful ignorance of the fact that the very men whom they were seeking were hiding less than a rod from them as they dashed along the trail, Cawdor and his constables hastened to the stockade where they were met by the nigh distracted Englishmen.

"Great boy, Baptiste!" exclaimed Ponsonby, as the M. P's swung down from their saddles. "You've certainly earned your money. I had no idea you would be back before to-morrow noon, at the earliest. I'll settle with you after things calm down a bit."

"And I'll do the same," declared Lord Forrest, then turned to the inspector: "Cawdor, if you don't recover Lady Forrest and Mrs. Ponsonby, I'll have you drummed out of the Royal North-west Mounted Police!"

"Oh, come, Hugh, that's going it a bit stiff—lots of things might happen which would make it impossible for the inspector to accomplish the task," expostulated his friend.

"For instance?" sneered the nobleman.

"Well, the fact that you should agree to pay the ransom, as Badeye demands."

The words produced a tremendous sensation among the constables and quickly Cawdor exclaimed:

"Have you had a demand for ransom so soon, my lord?"

"Yes, it came about six hours ago."

"How'd you get it?"

"It was thrown through the window."

"You haven't answered it, of course?"

"Most certainly. You cannot imagine I would leave any stone unturned to recover Lady Forrest from the hands of those ruffians!"

"What was the sum demanded?"

"Fifty thousand dollars for both the ladies."

"And you offered to pay it, my lord?"

"Why not?"

"We can restore Lady Forrest to you gratis—and Mrs. Ponsonby as well," he added looking toward the wealthy commoner.

"Then for the love of your King, go to it, man, don't stand round here prating about what you can do!"

"Yes, my lord—but there are a few things it is of the utmost importance for me to know."

"Then be quick about asking them. Why didn't you bring some extra horses so that Ponsonby and I could have mounts?"

"They are all we had with us, my lord."

"Do you mean to say you haven't been back to the Fort since you left here yesterday forenoon? What in the name of St. George have you been up to?"

This question brought to the mind of the inspector the fact that if he had listened to the requests and suggestions of his constables that they would have been at the Post in good time at least to have received the demand for ransom from Badeye, if not to have prevented the kidnapping and theft of the money. And as he realized these points, he became extremely uncomfortable, fearing least some of his men might betray him. But there is an *esprit de corps* among the splendid guardians of the great Northwest and, for the sake of maintaining their reputation unsoiled, none of the constables said a word about the heated discussion in which they had indulged while eating.

It was Ponsonby who finally came to the relief of the distressed inspector by exclaiming:

"This is no time to hold a quizz, Hugh. Just put your own words to the test, do something, don't talk!"

"But Cawdor wanted to ask me some questions."

"Then give him the chance, don't keep putting in your own oar. Now, Cawdor, what else do you wish to know?"

"Who took the reply back to Badeye and where the rendezvous was, sir."

"Big Moose delivered our answer, carrying it to a big jack pine, some five miles to the North." And then the commoner related the contents of the answer.

"Bad, very bad, sir," lamented the inspector.

"Bad? Why, pray?" interposed Lord Forrest.

"For the reason that Badeye is no fool and will realize that you were only playing with him to gain time while you summoned our corps. And I'll venture to say, sir, that by this time the thieving murderer is making all speed possible to cover."

This opinion put a new aspect on the matter—and the faces of the wealthy Englishmen grew even more serious than before as they realized its force.

"But what should we have done," demanded the nobleman.

"Have arranged for a meeting with them, my lord. By hook or by crook, you could have managed to keep the bandits along until we arrived—and then we could have swooped down on them, and rounded up the entire outfit."

"As it is, we may be obliged to trail them over all Mackenzie!"

"That's not the worst of it, Cawdor!" cried the storekeeper from his bunk.

"Then out with it, Dutchie," returned the inspector.

"That devil Big Moose knows that there are white women with the bandits!"

"Ha—where's the chief now?"

"Goodness only knows," returned Ponsonby. "He left her in a huff about four hours ago."

"H'm, that means that we've got to send a troop of men up to the village of his tribe in order to hold the braves in check—they'll all be likely to take the warpath when they hear of the prizes that are to be won. But there's this satisfaction, if you can think it is one, that between the Indians and the M. P's, Badeye and his band of kidnappers will be rounded up."

"Which I presume will be a blessing to this part of the country even if it should prove a negative satisfaction to us," returned Lord Forrest.

"What do you propose to do, Cawdor?" demanded the wealthy commoner, after a silence of several minutes.

"Take up the trail, sir."

"How?"

"Use one of Dutchie's canoes and paddle up to the big jack pine."



CHAPTER XVII.

THE ENGLISHMEN OBTAIN A GUIDE TO THE LAIR OF BADEYE.

Ere the inspector could put his plan into execution, however, there was an excited demand from the store-room:

"Where Dutchie?"

"Hello, that you, Joe? Come into the back room," called Fielder.

Hurriedly the newcomer obeyed but when he beheld the uniforms of the Mounted Police, he stopped on the threshold and looked from one to another of the occupants of the room, quizzically.

"What's up, Joe? Never mind about these people. You can talk before them, if you have anything to say."

But Joe, who was a half breed trapper, was not one to be driven to giving information, especially when it was important.

"What matter, you seek?" he asked, peering at the storekeeper.

"Yes, got shot up a bit, yesterday afternoon."

"Shot, by juju, who shoot?"

"Badeye."

At the mention of the notorious bandit, the trapper paled.

"Heem get pay?" he asked in a voice scarcely above a whisper.

"Yes, every cent."

"By juju, me, Joe, me go join Injuns an' tek heem trail!" snarled the halfbreed—and had it not been for the quick work of burly Constable O'Toole, the fellow would have slipped out the door.

"Sacre, what you do, stop me, Joe?" he demanded angrily.

"Just tell us what you know about the Indians going on the warpath," commanded Cawdor, divining that was the meaning the trapper intended his words to carry.

"Big Moose bucks, heem all go."

"Who for?"

"Badeye."

"Why?"

"Badeye, heem got heap pretty paleface squaws!"

At this vulgar allusion to their wives both Lord Forrest and the wealthy commoner clenched their fists and strode toward the little trapper as though they would wreak their vengeance on him.

"Don't take offense, my lord," soothed the inspector, hurriedly stepping between the men. "Joe is a poor, ignorant devil who doesn't know any better. Indeed, I venture that he has no idea the bandit's prisoners are Lady Forrest and Mrs. Ponsonby." And then, lower-

ing his voice and leaning toward the Englishman, he added: "From the way he talks, I think he can give us some very valuable information—indeed, he may save us days, perhaps weeks, of futile search for the outlaws."

These words had the effect of quieting the tempers of both the nobleman and the commoner and they resumed their former attitudes, while they awaited the further questions of the inspector.

"How do you know they've gone on the warpath, Joe?" continued Cawdor.

"My squaw, Marie, she done been up to the village after medicine for baby. She there when messenger come from Big Moose."

"Why, I thought you told me Big Moose was at his village?"

"Who, me, Joe, say that? Nevair! Yon don' listen right. Me, Joe, say messenger come from Big Moose he found trail Badeye, want all heem injun come to heem."

This announcement that the redskin was on the track of the leader of the Hold-up Men of Barren Lands sent the excitement of the hearers to concert pitch and breathlessly they awaited the next question and answer—and they were not disappointed!

"Where did Big Moose locate Badeye, Joe?"

"Over by dungeon."

"Dungeon, what do you mean by that?" exclaimed the inspector, to whom the fact that there was such a place in the region was a surprise.

"Heem hole in ground where Badeye hang out."

"Where?"

"Me, Joe, no know."

Searchingly the inspector looked at the trapper as he uttered his denial, as though he would look him through and through to learn whether or not the half-breed were concealing the location of the retreat for purposes of his own.

But Joe did not flinch before the stern glance.

"Willing to swear on your rifle you don't know where the dungeon is?" asked Cawdor, mentioning the oath that was held most sacred by the trappers in Barren Lands.

"Oui, ceratinment, yes, yes!" stammered the trapper, in his excitement mixing up his French and English.

"Have you any idea where it is?"

"Why?"

"Because we want to go there."

"After Badeye?"

"Yes."

"What heem do to you?"

"Nothing to me, directly. He simply stole the pay from Dutchie, yours among the money, ran off with Lady Forrest and Mrs. Ponsonby and either he or one of his men murdered Henri—that's the list of his latest raid."

"Sacre, Badeye heem, terrible feller. But heem got my monee so me, Joe, go with Injuns."

"Then we'll all go with the Indians," announced Ponsonby.

"Will they take us, do you think, Joe?" asked Cawdor, who knew the nature of the redmen thoroughly and was well aware that when they were out on little missions of vengeance such as the present, the fewer white men there were in the region, to say nothing of the M. P's., the better they liked it.

"U-um, no, me, Joe, no t'ink so."

"But why not? What do they care who goes along if they succeed in capturing Badeye?" demanded Lord Forrest, impatiently.

"You forget that it isn't Badeye the red devils are after, Hugh," exclaimed Ponsonby. "We're the ones who are after him!"

"Then by St. George! If there's danger of our wives falling into the hands of the Indians, we'll trail the braves! Come on men, we may be losing time that's invaluable!"

Part of this statement the trapper did not understand but he could make out enough of it to know that the tall Englishman desired to hurry and he quickly replied:

"No use go too quick, Injun no get to end of lake fore ten, mebbe 'leven 'clock."

"But why not—if the Big Moose has had time to trail the bandits, and send a messenger for his braves since he left here about midnight?" demanded Cawdor.

"'Cause braves, heem bringing Injun witch."

"What for?"

"To cuss out Badeye and bring heem from dungeon!"

"By Jove! That would be some sight to see, eh, Hugh?" exclaimed the wealthy commoner.

"Yes—if it weren't for the girls."

"Well, if the sorceress succeeds in drawing Badeye from his retreat we shall be able to get to them—at any rate, we shall be nearer to them than we are now."

"The thing to do is evidently to persuade the Indians to lead us to the dungeon," said Cawdor. "Where are they going to hit the trail, Joe?"

"Me, Joe, no know—somewhere near the end of the lake."

"How are they going to get to it?"

"Come in canoes."

"Then why can't we paddle down there and arrive before them, then conceal ourselves in the bushes and when they start out, trail them?" asked Forrest.

"And get shot for our pains?" returned the inspector. "You don't seem to realize, my lord, that Big Moose and his braves consider this a private matter—and they would resent the fact of being followed, even if they should not think we intended to prevent their carrying off the ladies."

"Then what can we do. It seems to me that we don't get anywhere. Every time a possible way of our locating the dungeon, there's always an objection!" snapped the nobleman, peevishly.

"I have it!" suddenly exclaimed Ponsonby. "Why not let Joe trail the bucks and then come back for us!"

"How about it, Joe, will you do that?" asked Cawdor.

"N—" began the trapper when the wealthy commoner interrupted.

"Perhaps a bunch of these would make you more willing," he smiled, drawing from his pocket several bills of large denomination.

At the sight of the money, the halfbreed's eyes sparkled and he shifted from one foot to the other, nervously.

"How about it now, Joe?" smiled the inspector. "Think you might possibly be able to do it?"

"How much Joe get?" demanded the trapper after deliberation for several minutes.

"One hundred dollars," announced Ponsonby.

"No joke?"

"Absolutely none. I'll give the money to your friend, Fielder, here, to keep for you, if that would make you feel any surer of getting it."

This offer proved a clincher and his face wreathed in smiles at the prospect of earning so much money in so short a time and he quickly said:

"All right. Joe do it. Heem go now and meet Injun. Come back here for others."

"Why not let us ride slowly down to the head of the lake?" suggested Forrest. "Joe, can't you blaze some sort of trail so Cawdor or some of his men can follow you?"

"Who, me, Joe? Sure, certainment!"

"Then what will it be?" demanded the inspector.

"Broken twigs on left side trail."

"Good, Mr. Ponsonby, if you'll just put Joe's reward in Dutchie's hands, I think he'll start right away."

Quickly was this formality complied with and with a hurried nod, the trapper disappeared from the stockade.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE BANDITS TAKE MORE CAPTIVES.

While the Englishmen and the members of the Royal North-West Mounted Police were waiting as patiently as possible for the time to come when they were to set out, there suddenly sounded the pounding of many hoofs.

Ignorant of whether it was a raid, *en masse*, of the Hold-up Men of Barren Lands, a bunch of Indian braves on the warpath or members of their own corps, the constables seized their carbines and rushed to the door that they might pour a volley into the approaching horsemen should they prove to be enemies.

But scarcely had they taken their stands than round a bend in the trail galloped the Superintendent of the Constabulary, himself, and at his heels came fifty splendid specimens of rugged manhood.

Briefly acknowledging the salute of the inspector, the superintendent exclaimed:

"Have you seen any horsemen go by here?"

"Horsemen, no, indeed. Who are they?"

"Members of Badeye's gang, we ran across them early this morning about five miles above the Fort. We tried to ride them down, but their mounts must be thoroughbreds for they outdistanced us and though we caught sight of them several times afterward, we lost them entirely some ten miles back."

"Are you sure they were members of the Hold-up Men?"

"Positive. I recognized Long Hair through my binoculars and Powers identified the other two as Buster and Easy."

"Then they've probably gone to the dungeon," announced Cawdor.

"Where's that?" demanded the superintendent.

"Where Badeye is holding Lady Forrest and Mrs. Ponsonby prisoners for fifty thousand dollars ransom apiece."

"Well, if you know the place, why, in the name of the

King, don't you go to it—instead of hanging round this Post?"

"We're waiting, sir, for a guide to take us," returned the inspector and quickly he gave his superior a graphic account of all the exciting incidents of which he knew in connection with the kidnapping and theft of the money.

Dismounting as soon as he had received this report, the superintendent entered the stockade and was soon chatting with the two Englishmen.

Their conversation was interrupted, however, by a cry from O'Toole:

"Here comes Joe paddling up the lake for dear life!"

Instantly the men all hastened down to the landing.

"What's happened, Joe?" asked Cawdor, noting from the expression on the trapper's face that some event of unusual importance must have transpired.

But the sight of the many times augmented squad of the M. P.'s. caused him to sit and stare in wonder.

"Where'd heem come from?" he finally asked.

"Fort Rae. But never mind about them, have you come to guide us to the dungeon?"

"Oui! Oui! Oui! An' heem mus' be queeck. Big Moose, heem been killed!"

"Who told you?"

"Whitewolf. Heem went head to join Big Moose an' found him dead, shot full of holes in face."

"Then why must we hurry?"

"Injun no going to bring witch to draw Badeye from dungeon."

"Why?"

"Send Whitewolf and five bucks beside to lay and watch for Badeye—an' shoot heem. Me fix with Whitewolf to be guide—for money."

Smiling at the low voice in which the trapper added these last, but most important, words of all, Ponsonby asked:

"How much?"

"Same as me."

Cawdor was on the point of protesting when Lord Forrest silenced him by agreeing to pay the extra fee and quickly the men swung onto their horses, the Englishmen riding with the superintendent and the inspector while Joe wriggled about behind O'Toole.

At the head of the lake, they picked up Whitewolf and the other members of the avenging party and then proceeded with the utmost caution.

But when they had arrived within a few hundred yards of the retreat, they were startled to hear blood-curdling shrieks.

"Quick, men, it may be that the devils are torturing the women!" gasped Ponsonby.

But Whitewolf instantly dispelled his fears!

"That not paleface, him Injun!" he grunted.

"Then what does it mean? I thought your people weren't going to the dungeon?"

"Him changed mind after Joe gone. 'Bout twenty go. Just to see dead chief and take body to village."

At the first outcry, Whitewolf had despatched one of his companions to learn the cause and that they might not walk into any trap, the manhunters halted until the scout should return.

But when he did, his face was as white as it could be under the covering of gaudy-hued paint with which it was streaked!

"Little Fox, Big Feather and Hop Toad caught in traps!" he exclaimed in his native tongue, which Joe

interpreted for the Englishmen and the officers of the constabulary.

"Why don't some of the others let them out?" demanded Whitewolf.

"They all ran away when the first one caught Little Fox!"

What the Indian brave thought of such actions on the part of his fellows, he did not say—but his actions were eloquent. For he started to the assistance of his tribesmen at a swift run.

Close at his heels galloped several of the M. P's.

But when they reached the spot where the scout had declared the bucks were held prisoner there wasn't the sign of a man, Indian or white, to be seen!

CHAPTER XIX.

BADEYE GETS RID OF A TROUBLE-MAKER.

When Long Hair, Buster and Easy reached the dungeon, they went from one of the trap doors to another, giving the three signal knocks by which bandits made their presence known to one another.

They had expected to find their chief and companions in the big room and consequently, when their signal was greeted by a woman's voice, exclaiming: "Is that you, Hal?" they stared at one another in amazement.

"Let's go down and find out what's up," suggested Easy. But his companions quickly outvoted him.

"Badeye's evidently been up to some deviltry again—which would account for the large force of the M. P's. we saw leaving the Fort this morning," declared Long Hair. "That being the case, the thing to do is to find the fellows, if they're here." And quickly he went to the trap door leading to the bandit-chief-tain's bunkroom.

For several minutes, none of the sleeping men were aroused by the repeated rappings. But at last Redtop heard them and gave the answering signal, one long and one short whistle.

"They're down there," exclaimed Buster. And as Redtop slid back the secretly moving rock, the three late arrivals of the gang dropped to the floor below.

"How's things?" asked Pieface, who had awakened.

"Fine. We cleaned up a couple of banks down in the Athabasca river region. Got a good chunk of boodle, too. But say, what's the meaning of the dames in the big room? Badeye been getting spliced?"

"No, I only wish he had. Between you and me, he's got us into an all-fired bad mess—but don't let on to him I think——"

The awakening of the bandit chieftain put an end to any further confidences between the member of the gang and Redtop related the events of the kidnapping and the theft of the Fur company's money.

"Say, Badeye, you're sure dippy to run yourself into such a game as that. Why that old moss-backed Fur company'll quit paying dividends, if it has to, to provide money to trail us down!" declared Buster.

"Now let me have a peep at the skirts and I'll tell you if you've made as bad a break with them as you have with the pay dirt."

For several moments the notorious leader of the Hold-up Men of Barren Lands gazed at the outlaw who had dared criticize him so severely, at last saying:

"See here, Buster, just because you've copped a few hundred dollars from some little one man bank down country, you've got such a swelled-head I'm surprised you could get it through the trap door."

"On these ladies in the big room we stand to win one hundred thousand dollars! Just say that over to yourself a few times and listen to its sound."

"But if you fellows are tired of having me for a leader, I'm perfectly willing you should clear out—only you've got to go now!"

And as he spoke, the bandit-chieftain whipped out his shooting irons and swept them back and forth on a line with the faces of his astonished followers.

For a long time, Badeye had been conscious of the fact that Buster was taking every opportunity possible to belittle him and run him down to the other members of the gang and, when he broke forth into such caustic comment, he determined to take the bull by the horns and settle the matter once and for all.

"Why, ain't any of you going?" he sneered after a silence which was so intense it could have been cut with a knife. "You don't mean to say you're going to stay with us, Buster? From the line of talk you've been handing out lately, I thought all you was looking for was the chance to start a rival gang to mine. But I've given you the chance—and you're too much of a dirty sneaking little coward to go!"

As he uttered these words, the notorious bandit sprang to his feet and with a stride reached the amazed Buster. Never in all their long years of association with their leader had they seen him so wrought up as he was at that moment, and they wondered what was in store for their pal.

But not long were they kept in suspense!

Putting one of his sixshooters back into his belt, Badeye frisked the pockets of his underhireling, throwing everything onto the floor.

"Where's the money you got for your share of the bank robberies down the line?" he roared.

"I never got a cent—Long Hair has the whole swag!"

"Is that so, Long Hair?"

"I've got the share that belongs to you and the rest of the boys, but Easy and the other fellers got theirs."

"So you can't even tell the truth to your boss, eh?" sneered Badeye. "Now dig up that boodle or I'll send your miserable little soul down into the lower regions where it'll sizzle and splutter. Be lively!"

And to lend force to his words, the bandit-chieftain pressed the cold steel muzzle of his revolver against the outlaw's temple!

"How can I dig it when you got your gun agin my head?" he finally growled.

"That's for you to find out. Come, my finger's getting nervous."

An instant longer the erstwhile braggart defied his master, then with a whine against this arrogance, he put his hand in the bosom of his shirt and took out a buckskin pouch.

"You ain't got so low down you've taken to holding up your own gang, have you?" he sneered as he handed the bag to Badeye.

But the leader of the bandits gave him no heed, saying to Redtop:

"Just take this money, count it and divide it among you—and anything else in that pile on the floor."

"This white-livered coyote didn't have a cent to his

name when he joined us and he won't have one when he leaves.

"Since you haven't got the nerve to get out on your own hook, Buster, I'm going to throw you out! Pieface, open the trap!"

As he spoke, the bandit-chieftain seized the trembling outlaw as though he were a bag of sawdust and swung him back and forth several times to get momentum.

"Now when you go out, Buster, just remember that the very first time I lay eyes on you, I'll drill you full of lead! So long!" And with a mighty heave, he sent the disgraced desperado sailing through the trap door!

CHAPTER XX.

THE NET TIGHTENS ABOUT THE HOLD-UP MEN.

The effect of this summary expulsion of Buster from their nefarious gang caused the other members to whisper among themselves.

"Any of you don't like what I did to Buster? You can go, if that's the case, every mother's son of you!"

"Now don't get all het up, Badeye," soothed Red-top. "We was just saying among ourselves that it seemed sort of tough to throw the kid out and not give him a cent. That's all."

"Then forget it—why, man dear, that sneak's got more cold, hard cash salted than you've any idea. I know because the last time I missed any money out of my jeans, I watched him, saw him lift a couple of hundred and then trailed him to his cache—and say, he had a bale of it that would feed an elephant!"

"Why didn't you call him?" demanded Slasher.

"What was the use. I wanted to wait until he got up against something pretty stiff and then I decided to turn him loose—and I've done it. If he doesn't get from five to fifteen for those bank jobs, I'll miss my reckoning."

"But let's pass him up from now on. Long Hair, did you have any trouble getting away?"

"Didn't even see a fly mug or an M. P. until this morning—and then we had to ride hard for it to beat them out."

"Where was that?" asked Badeye, in surprise.

"Down by the Fort. I seen one guy put his glasses on us, so I reckon they know who we are, all hunky."

"They didn't see you turn in here, did they?"

"Naw, we shook 'em in about five miles. But they didn't stop coming."

"H'm, how many was there?"

"All of fifty."

"With the four we saw last night, or rather this morning, when we were coming from the lake to the dungeon, that makes fifty-four, then there's the two Englishmen, that makes fifty-six—and heaven only knows how many trappers they've lined up by this time."

"If we could only get the bucks to fighting 'em, it would give us a chance to make a sneak."

"As it is, we'd better just move our kegs of powder over this way and put 'em into their holes, against the coming of too many M. P's."

Plainly did these instructions tell the outlaws the

danger which their leader believed them to be in—and for a moment several of them wished they had been expelled from the gang at the same time as Buster. But it was only for an instant that this disloyalty showed and the men went about the preparations which were to be their death warrants with a will!

In the midst of them, however, the outlaws were surprised to hear another wail from the wolf traps. And no sooner had its piercing echo died away than shrieks sounded from the direction of the other two traps!

"Shall I see what's doing?" answered Pieface, excitedly.

"Not on your life! The springing of the three of them at the same time, almost shows there's a bunch of people round here—and if you should raise the trap door, you'd let them know where it's located—which is just what they'd give a sizeable pile of money to find out."

"It's nothing but Injuns, anyhow," declared Slasher, after listening intently to the tones.

"Evidently, we nipped Big Moose just in time," chuckled Badeye. "He probably thought he'd raid us. But I reckon the sight of his carcass, together with my note, will change their minds."

But the bandit-chieftain was mistaken in this prophecy!

For the five men who were to stay in the locality day after day in order to avenge the death of their chief were even then drawing close to the spot—and with them were coming the troop of Royal North-west Mounted Police.

Suddenly, Badeye seemed to change his mind and, springing to the ladder, went up, cautiously gazed about, then darted toward the first captive in the wolf trap whom he brought to the entrance to the cave and then dropped in, after which he went through the same performance with the other two.

And just as he was sliding the stone panel back into place, he heard the cries of amazement that went up from the Troopers and Indians at the disappearance of the captured braves!

"We're sure in for a siege of it now," he chuckled, as he reached the floor.

"Well, with these handsome looking gents, here, it seems as though we ought to find out what was going on," grinned Pieface. "How about it, you wall-eyed mut, what's doing up above?"

And he gave the steel trap holding the leg of the brave called Hop Toad a vicious kick which caused the redskin to groan with pain!

"Now don't whine and complain," sneered the outlaw. "Just answer my question—or I'll give you another one!"

"Come, speak up lively—what's going on up there? Who're all the people who've just arrived, some of your fellow scalpers?"

But Hop Toad, his face terrible to behold because of the diabolical fury written on it, was true to the traditions of his race—and simply glowered at his tormentor!

"I'll attend to you later, you redskinned mut!" snarled the outlaw. "Let's see what this lad's got to say?" and he bestowed a kick upon the lower part of Big Feather's leg!

The buck did not have the forbearance of Hop Toad, however, and, though the pain must have been terrific, he bounded to his feet, seized a chair, swung it around

his head with incredible swiftness and brought it down full upon Pieface's head, sending him crashing to the floor!

"Serves him right for torturing the poor devils so!" declared Slasher.

"That may be," agreed Badeye. "But don't none of the rest of you try any funny business. There's none too many of us here as it is."

"And there's a heap sight more of you than there'll be to-night when the M. P's. get through with you!" jeered Little Fox.

"Much obliged, you with the ingrowing face, for the information. So long as it's white men who have come, I don't care. I was only afraid it was some more of Big Moose's dirty tribe—and I don't want to be obliged to bring any more in here!" chuckled Badeye.

"Well, you won't get the chance—don't worry!" retorted Little Fox. "If you don't believe me, just raise that trap and see what happens to you!"

"Oh ho, that's their game is it, sharpshooting!" exclaimed the bandit-chieftain—and instantly he grew very grave, finally adding: "It's sure a mighty good thing they don't know the locations of the secret doors."

"But they will before long—Buster'll tell 'em!" gloated Big Feather.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE RED MASSACRE.

The expressions which this statement drew to the faces of the bandits was ample vengeance for all the suffering the inhuman brutes had inflicted upon the suffering redskins whose legs had not been removed from the wicked steel jaws of the wolf traps.

"Oh, Buster wouldn't do a trick like that—and I don't think he'd have the nerve," finally declared Red-top. But his voice lacked sincerity and it was evident that he was saying things he wished to believe rather than that he did.

And even this faint hearted solace was short-lived.

"Wouldn't he, eh?" chuckled Little Fox. "Pale-face no like Injun, no stick together, all lie like devil save um necks. Buster, him told me he tell my people where doors were for five hundred dollars!"

"What, the dirty sneak sell out his old pals for a few dollars like that!" roared the bandit-chieftain, leaping to his feet and pacing up and down the room in a vain effort to master his feelings.

"Uhuh, only five hundred—and me sent um White-wolf, he chief now! Uhuh, Badeye heap big fool chuck Buster out!"

This taunt was more than he could bear and whirling savagely, the leader of the Hold-up Men of Barren Lands, with the seeming realization that he had attempted too much and that his doom was near, rushed upon the helpless Indians.

"Shut up, you lying devils!" he thundered. "Make another sound, so much as open your lips to talk to one another and I'll give you the most terrible punishment you ever received!"

To Hop Toad and Big Feather, the tone of his voice indicated that he had been baited beyond endurance

and they wisely kept silent—but Little Fox laughed gleefully at the threat.

But the next instant, he bitterly regretted his act!

With a snort more like the cry of a wild animal than a human being, the bandit-chieftain was upon him!

Bending over, he seized the foot of the leg held in the terrible jaws of the steel trap and began to jerk viciously.

For several moments, the buck stood the excruciating pain, then suddenly went insane with the agony and burst into the most ear-splitting, bloodcurdling shrieks and wails!

And Badeye's monstrous brutality was destined to be his doom!

Frantically he called to the redskin to be silent—but the buck paid him no heed.

Finding words of no avail, the leader of the outlaws tried beating him with the butt of his rifle—and when this proved equally unavailing, he whipped out his sixshooter and sent a bullet crashing into Little Fox's skull!

And just as the pistol was discharged, Inspector Cawdor and Constable O'Toole chanced to be walking over the room!

"What's that?" demanded the latter. "Didn't you hear anything? It seemed to me I heard the wailing of a soul in purgatory and then a boom like the crack of doom!"

"By St. George! I wonder if we can be over one of the rooms of the dungeon!" exclaimed the inspector. "You just stand where you are, O'Toole and I'll go and have the 'super' set all the boys to work prodding the ground with their bayonets. It'll sure be a feather in our caps if we can locate the hole!"

And even as he finished speaking, he set out to put his words into effect.

His statement was heard with eager interest by the Englishmen and the superintendent and with a will the men went to work jabbing the earth.

In the meantime, the women who had been kidnapped were suffering now from fear and now from fatigue until at last they dropped into a merciful sleep, but not before they had heard the shots which were poured into Big Moose and the wails of the crazed Indian roused them in time to hear the cursing of the bandit-chieftain.

"There must be something unusual going on up above, Judith," whispered Lady Forrest. "You don't suppose Hugh and Harold can have arrived?"

But before Mrs. Ponsonby could reply to the question, she heard the sharp click of metal against the stone which marked the entrance to the room in which she and the noblewoman were imprisoned.

"Do you think that's a trick of the bandits or—ro—" began Lady Forrest.

But the wife of the wealthy commoner paid her no heed!

With that intuition inherent in women, Mrs. Ponsonby felt that the rapping was of deepest concern to her and to the other women who had suffered so much and with a struggle born of newly aroused hope, she scrambled up the ladder with an agility that would have done any of the bandits accustomed to the footing as they were, proud and beat with might and main against the under side of the stone with the hilt of a dagger that she had picked up on her way to the steps.

Long had the tide of Fortune been against the brave and plucky women—but at last it had turned—the man prodding the earth in the effort to locate one of the entrances to the subterranean retreat was none other than Mr. Ponsonby!

Not keen of hearing, so desperately did the woman strive to make her presence known that the Englishman felt—rather than heard—her efforts—and suddenly standing up, shouted:

"I want the man in the crowd with the best pair of ears!"

The demand instantly attracted the rest of the searchers and while they ran up, Cawdor replied:

"O'Toole is the man for you, Mr. Ponsonby."

"Then send him here!" returned the wealthy commoner—but scarcely had the words left his lips than the constable appeared at his elbow.

"What is it, sir?" he asked eagerly.

Yet before the other could reply, he had caught the sound of the pounding from below!

"Glory be—I think, sir, we've found the ladies!" exclaimed the constable.

"Don't stop to think, man—find out!"

Instantly the Irishman dropped to his knees and, making a scoop of his bayonet, soon laid bare the flat surface of the secret rock.

But as the onlookers beheld the flat surface, they scarcely breathed, so fearful were they that they might be disappointed.

"Can you hear anything?" whispered Ponsonby to the constable.

"Sure I can."

"Then give an answering knock."

Willingly O'Toole obeyed—and as he pounded the second time, he struck the hidden spring!

Back rolled the trap door—and the woman who had been through such heartrending ordeals gazed into the face of her husband!

For a moment, Mrs. Ponsonby gazed into the faces peering down at her—then it seemed to her reeling mind that thousands of hands were stretched down to her. And in a trice she was lifted to the surface and was locked in the arms of her husband!

But in his great joy at finding his wife safe and alive, the wealthy commoner did not forget his friend.

Putting back the arms of his wife, he asked:

"Is Angela down below—and safe?"

"Yes, perfectly—the bandits gave us the big room all to ourselves!"

At the words, several of the members of the Royal North-west Mounted Police crowded toward the narrow entrance—but O'Toole was the first one to drop down.

"Who are you? Where is Judith?" demanded Lady Forrest, as the constable landed on the floor.

"Hush, my lady, I'm a friend. Just keep quiet a couple of minutes and I'll have you in the care of Lord Forrest," he whispered. And picking up the woman, he ran toward the ladder and, holding to the side with one hand, raised the dainty creature aloft with the other until she was seized by the men above.

But even as the noblewoman was drawn to the surface, there sounded the bark of several pistols in the room from which she had been rescued—the outlaws, having heard the sounds of voices and suspecting that the location of one of the entrances had been discovered, whether by chance or through the treachery of

Buster they did not know, had run back the door joining the big room to the bunk room of Badeye.

And as they had done so, they caught sight of the legs of the intrepid constable on the ladder!

"They've found our retreat—and recaptured the women!" exclaimed Redtop.

"Then pump your guns into the devil who's responsible!" snapped Badeye.

And as he spoke, the guns in the hands of every one of the outlaws barked.

A moment, O'Toole swayed on the ladder, as pellet after pellet of lead found its lodging place in his body, then, unable longer to resist the shock, his hold on the ladder relaxed and he fell back to the floor!

"Hurrah! We've got one of them! Hold your cartridges—and pump the next devil who shows himself full!" shouted Badeye. "We can stand off hundreds of them!"

But his exultation was premature!

A dozen or more of the constabulary had seen the body of their popular comrade riddled with bullets and with an angry growl, like the subdued snarl of a tigress about to spring upon her prey they thrust their carbine into the opening and blazed away as though by their rain of death bearing lead they would atone the shooting of their comrade.

Practically no chance did they have to aim—and less to see the men at whom they were shooting—but fortune was with them and two agonized shrieks told them that some of their bullets had landed in mortal spots!

"Great work! Great work!" cried the superintendent. "Give it to 'em boys! Drive 'em back from the room if you can. Then we'll be able to go down and smoke them out!"

These words were followed by a terrible rain of bullets—but the outlaws, having seen Redtop and Easy drop, had learned discretion and withdrawn out of range behind the protecting jambs of the door, standing so that they could see any one who should be rash enough to descend the ladder.

When several minutes had failed to bring any volley from the bandits, one of the constables exclaimed:

"They've gone to another room! I'm going down! Who'll come with me?"

Instantly there was a mighty cry of: "I!" "I!" "I!"

And before any of their superiors could interfere, five of the brave fellows dropped to the floor—but even before they struck it, the crash of the guns in the outlaws' hands rang out!

"Come on, men! I want volunteers to go down and wipe the devils out of the earth!" shouted Cawdor.

Ere he could put his rash intention to the test, however, he was seized by Ponsonby and the superintendent.

"Don't be a fool!" exclaimed the wealthy commoner. "There's no use in sacrificing the lives of your men needlessly. We've recovered the ladies. If necessary we can post a guard over this entrance and either force the devils to come out or starve them to death!"

A few short, sharp words did his superior speak to the inspector—and he gave up his purpose though with the greatest reluctance. But his disappointment at not being able to accomplish either the deaths or the capture of the Hold-up Men of Barren Lands was quickly assuaged by Mrs. Ponsonby.

"Why don't you try to locate the trap doors leading

to the other rooms, just as you did the one in which we were? You have the general idea of where the caves are situated so it ought not to be very difficult."

The suggestion met with instant approval and dividing his men into squads of five, the superintendent set them at work jabbing the ground systematically—and the desired result was quickly produced.

When they were about thirty feet from the opening through which the kidnapped women had been drawn up, one of the constables cried:

"I've struck the trap door!"

Immediately his fellows began to tear away the earth from the spot where he held his bayonet, quickly disclosing a broad piece of stone exactly similar to that which had covered the entrance to the big room. And as before, experimental poundings disclosed the secret spring by which the mechanism was operated—and with a groan that trap shot back, revealing the bandits clustered below.

An instant the men on the top of the ground stared down at those below, then threw their carbines to their shoulders.

But before they could pull the triggers, Cawdor leaped to the edge of the opening and cried:

"Will you surrender?"

The crash of a volley was the answer—and as the bullets whistled through the opening, the superintendent bellowed:

"Throw yourselves on the ground! Nobody show himself at the edge of the hole. Barry, you, Peters, Parrish, and Hartley go to the horses and ride for your lives to the Post on Lake Rey and get some dynamite! I reckon we can get these outlaws without turning the attempt into a massacre!"

Quickly the men leaped away in obedience to the command and soon were burning the trail in their endeavor to get the terrible explosive and return in as little time as possible.

During the wait, the constables sat about, guns across their knees, eyes focussed upon the two openings they had discovered—but never a sign did they see of the men they were so eager either to capture or kill.

Convinced that they had not the slightest chance in the world to escape or even to make any appreciable slaughter of the enemies by attempting a bold sortie, the outlaws withdrew to the farthest corner of Badeye's bunkroom and held a consultation of war.

"So long's as we've got to die, I'm for taking as many of the M. P.'s. with us as we can!" announced Redtop with a reckless abandon that would have been heroic had he not been the murderer and villain that he was.

"Same here!" chimed in the other members of the Hold-up gang of Barren Land.

"That sounds fine, but how are we going to do it!" demanded Pieface.

"This way!" announced the bandit-chieftain. "We'll bring the kegs of powder we took back into the holes out into this room, cover them with some of our clothes and then roll them along the floor until the M. P.'s. catch sight of them."

"When they do, they'll shoot—and here's hoping there won't be enough of them left to feed a crow!"

"And we'll go along with them no, not for mine!" commented Redtop.

"Then if you've a better plan, out with it!" commanded his leader.

"I don't know as it's better—it's the same idea, only instead of rolling the kegs in here, I say we take them into the kitchen. The M. P.'s. haven't discovered the entrance to that yet. With a little trouble, we can slide the trap door back, then raise the cap and coat of a dummy we've rigged up."

"The men will fire at it quick enough and as it's riddled with lead, it'll drop to the floor. The fools will try to follow, just as they did in Badeye's bunkroom—and some of them will be sure to shoot into the kegs of powder."

"And when they explode, we'll be breaking for cover from the opening in the big room—and we'll be able to find plenty of horses in the woods, so we're practically certain of a safe getaway!"

"Fine! Great!" cried the other bandits as this plan, which, with even the slightest luck, would enable them once again to give their pursuers the laugh, was unfolded.

With a will they set at work carrying the kegs of the terrible explosive back into the kitchen.

In so doing, however, it was necessary for them to pass through one corner of Badeye's bunkroom.

But as the five bandits were following one another closely, each with a keg in his arms, one of the constables chanced to peer through the opening.

The instant he beheld the forms of the bandits, he raised his carbine to his shoulder and pulled the trigger.

Sounded a roar as though all the artillery in the world was being discharged, then the earth seemed to burst asunder—a dense mass of smoke and flame leaped forth—and when quiet had settled upon the forest once more, the ground was strewn with the mangled bodies of a score and odd of the brave members of the Royal North-west Mounted Police.

Fortunately, the Englishmen and their wives had gone to one side of the field in which the underground retreat was located and thus they escaped a terrible death.

Sufficient of the bodies of two of the bandits were found to identify them as Redtop and Easy and of the fifty-four constables who took part in the round-up of the Hold-up Men of Barren Lands only ten escaped without the loss of a limb—and in consequence of the awful fate which overtook the brave men, the engagement with the bandits is known throughout the great North-west as the Red Massacre!

So terrible was the reaction from the awful scene that with one accord, those who were able, left the spot—but the next day, when the party of English people returned to the field, they scared away a coyote.

And there lay the bandit chief dead in the vast, dreary wilderness!

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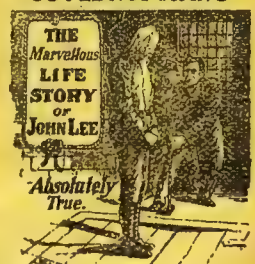
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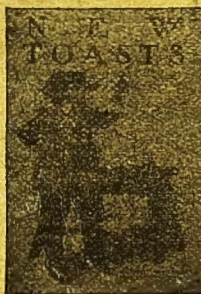
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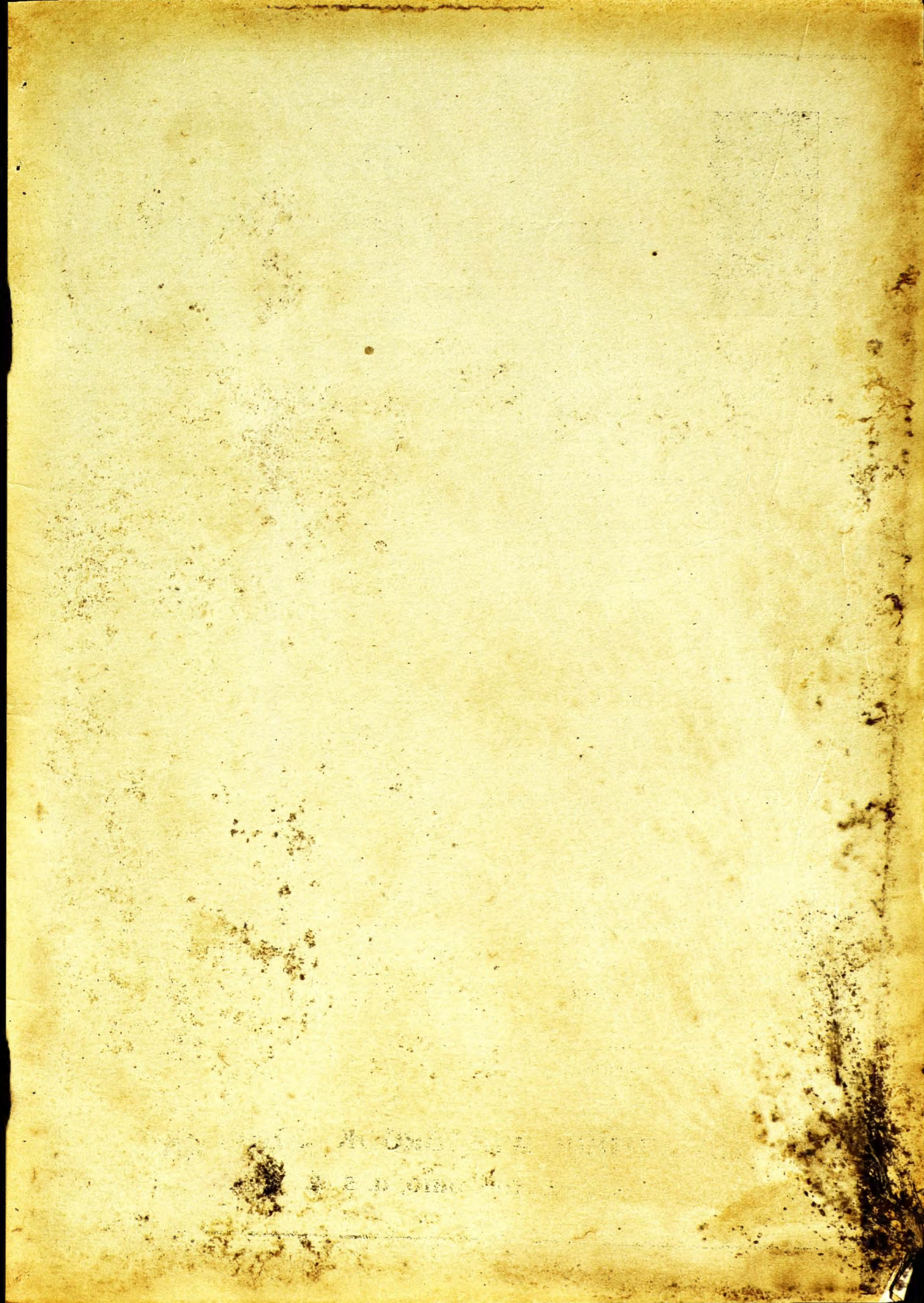
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